

# THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST 1, 1874.

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## IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT.

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### CHAPTER XXIV.

BACK AGAIN AT PARK NEWTON.

GENERAL ST. GEORGE'S health improved so rapidly that, contrary to his first intention, he decided that he would return to England at once and, if possible, get settled down somewhere by Christmas. As he was running his eye through the *Times* one day he saw, to his intense astonishment, that Park Newton was advertised to be let. By the next post he sent a brief note to Kester, calling his attention to the advertisement, and asking him the meaning of it. In due course he received the following reply.

"My dear Uncle,—The advertisement to which you allude has no other meaning than is visible on the surface of it. Park Newton is empty, and empty it will remain as far as I am concerned. Why not, therefore, try to find a tenant for it, and make at the same time a welcome addition to my income? I know what you will say—that, as the head of the family, it is my duty to live in the family home. That is very well from your point of view, but to me the place is burdened with a memory so terrible (which time can never efface or cause to fade from my mind) that for me to live there is a sheer impossibility.

"But, apart from all this, I think you know me sufficiently well to feel sure that to me a country life would soon become insupportable. After the first freshness had worn off—after I had eaten some of my own peaches and drunk some of my own buttermilk—after I had been duly coached by my bailiff in the mysteries of subsoils and top-dressings, whatever they may be—and after going through all the dull round of bucolic hospitality: I should be sure to cut the whole affair in disgust some fine day, and not recover my peace of mind till after a dinner at the *Trois Frères* and a little box at the *Gymnase*.

"So, my dear uncle, should you happen to hear of any eligible individual who would be content to pass his days among the dull but respectable commonplaces of English country life, pray try to secure him as a tenant for Park Newton, and render grateful for ever—your affectionate nephew,

KESTER ST. GEORGE.

"P.S. You say nothing in your note as to the state of your health. May I take it in this case that no news is good news, and that you are stronger and better than when I saw you last? I hope so with all my heart."

To this General St. George sent the following answer :

"Dear Nephew,—I will become the tenant of Park Newton. If one member of the family doesn't choose to live there, all the more reason why another should. No stranger shall call the old roof-tree his home while I am alive. I am better in health, thank Heaven, and you will probably see me in England before Christmas.—Yours,

"ARTHUR ST. GEORGE."

In taking this step General St. George was guided as much by Richard Dering's wishes as by his own inclinations in the matter. "Nothing could have fallen out more opportunely for the purpose I have in view," Richard had said to him when the advertisement was first noticed.

"I can't see in what way it will assist your views for you to immure yourself at Park Newton," said the General.

"I shall be there, on the spot itself," answered Richard ; "and that seems to me one of the first essentials."

"You fairly puzzle me," said the General, with a shake of the head. "I can't see what more you can do than you have done already. It seems to me like groping in the dark."

"You are right, uncle—it is like groping in the dark. And yet I feel as sure as that I am standing here at the present moment that sooner or later a ray of light will be vouchsafed to me from somewhere. As to when and how it will come, I know nothing ; but that it will come, if I clothe my soul with patience, I never for one moment doubt."

"My poor boy ! But why not let well alone ? You are wasting your life in the chase of a phantom. Be content with what you have achieved already."

"Never—never—so help me Heaven ! I will go on groping in the dark, as you call it, till in that dark I clutch my enemy's hand—and drag out of it into the full light of day the man on whose head lies the innocent blood of Percy Osmond."

"A waste of youth, of hope, of happiness," said the old soldier sadly.

"For me there is neither youth, nor hope, nor happiness, till my task is accomplished. Uncle Arthur, I have set myself to do this thing, and no power on earth can move me from it."

"I am heart and soul with you, boy, as you know full well already. But at times it does seem to me as if you were following nothing better than a deceptive will-o'-the-wisp, which, the further you follow it, the further it will lead you astray."

"No will-o'-the-wisp, uncle, but a steadfast-shining star; blood-red like Mars, if you will, but a guide across the pathless waste which leads to the goal I have set myself to obtain."

Three weeks later General St. George and his nephew were settled at Park Newton, while Mrs. Garside and Edith installed themselves in a pretty little cottage half a mile beyond the park gates, but on the side opposite to Duxley.

Lionel Dering's marriage was still kept a profound secret: and as Edith, during the short time she had lived at Duxley, had never gone out without a thick veil over her face, there was not much fear that she would be recognized in her new home. Richard Dering rode over to the Cottage every other day, and we may be sure that Jane Culpepper was also a frequent visitor. Equally a matter of course was it that Tom Bristow, by the merest chance in the world, should often call in during the very time that Miss Culpepper was there: for Providence is kind to lovers and seems often to arrange meetings for them without their taking any trouble to do so on their own account.

Not a single day—nay, not a single hour had Kester St. George spent at Park Newton since his accession to the property. He had been down to Duxley on two occasions and had taken up his quarters at the Royal Hotel, where his steward had waited upon him for the transaction of necessary business, and where the chief tenants of the estate had been invited to a banquet at his expense. But not once had he set foot even inside the park gates. He hated the place, the neighbourhood, the people. London and Paris, according to his view, were the only places fit for a man of fortune to live in, and it was from the latter place that he despatched a letter to his uncle, half ironical in tone, congratulating that veteran on his choice of the ancestral roof-tree for his future home, and hoping that he might live for fifty years to enjoy it. The general smiled grimly to himself as he read the letter and tossed it over to Richard.

"Uncle, you must invite him here before we are many weeks older," said the latter.

"But he hates the place and won't come."

"He hates the place undoubtedly, but he will come all the same if you couch your invitation properly."

"In what terms would you like me to couch it?"

"Pardon me for saying so, but you have only got to hint that you feel you are growing old, and that you have serious thoughts of making your will before long, and then press him to come and see you."

"And you think the bait will tempt him?"

"I am sure of it. Your property would make a nice addition to his income. He would be the most dutiful and affectionate of nephews as long as you lived; he would bury you with every outward semblance of regret; and a month later there would be another hunter in his stable at Newmarket."

"Faith, I believe you're right, Dick. But not a single penny of my money will ever go to Kester St. George. All the same, I'll write the letter in the way you wish it to be written, when you tell me the time for sending it has come."

"We will let Christmas get quietly over, and then we will talk about it again."

But once again the General was puzzled. "I'm bothered if I can comprehend why you want to invite Kester to Park Newton," he said. "You hate the man, and yet you want me to ask him to come and stop under the same roof with you, where you must, out of common courtesy, meet him once or twice every day all the time he is here."

"The coming of Kester St. George to Park Newton is merely another link in the chain of evidence, which Bristow and I together are trying to forge out of the very poor materials at our command. It may prove in the end to be nothing better than a chain of sand—or it may prove strong enough to drag a murderer to his doom."

The General shuddered slightly. "Your words are very strong, my boy," he said. "I have seen so many tragedies in the course of the sixty years I have lived in this world that I have no desire ever to see another—least of all among those of my own kith and kin."

Richard did not answer at once. He rose from his chair, went to the window, and stood gazing out across the frosty landscape. At length he spoke gravely, almost sadly.

"My hand is put to the plough, uncle, and I cannot—I dare not draw back."

"No doubt you are right, and I am wrong," said the General meekly. "But I sometimes tremble when I look into the future, and ask myself what all these disguises and plottings have for their aim and object."

"They have but one aim and one object," said Richard sternly, "both of which are comprised in one word—and that word is Retribution."

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord," said the old soldier in a reverent whisper.

A deep sigh came from the bosom of the younger man. Again he paused before answering. "Oh, uncle! is there no pity, no thought for me?" he said. "Think of what I have suffered, of all that I have undergone! Name, wealth, position, lost to me for ever unless I can prove I am not the murderer that the world believed me to be. My very identity gone. Obligated to die and be buried, and assume the name and identity of another man; or live the life of a hunted animal, with a price set on my head, and with the ever-present shadow of a



shameful death eating the life out of me inch by inch. Oh, think of all and pity me!"

"I have thought of it all, day and night, night and day, for months. You know that I pity you from the bottom of my soul."

"Had it not been for you, and Edith, and Bristow—God bless him! I should have shot myself long ago."

"Don't talk in that way, Dick—don't talk in that way!"

"Unless—unless I had taught myself to live for the sake of retribution," went on the other as if he had not heard his uncle's words. "And retribution is not vengeance; it is simple repayment—simple justice." He paused like one deep in thought.

"Do you know, uncle," he resumed with a startling change of tone, "do you know that a night hardly ever passes without my being visited by Percy Osmond. His cold hand touches mine and I awake to see him standing close beside me. He never speaks, he only looks at me. But oh! that look—so pleading, so reproachful, so soul-imploring! Awake and asleep it haunts me ever. It is a look that says, 'How much longer shall I lie in my blood-stained shroud, and justice not be done upon my murderer?' It is a look that says, 'Another day gone by and nothing done—nothing discovered.' Then he fades gradually, and I see no more of him till next night; but my hand remains numb and cold for more than an hour after he has left me."

The General was staring at Richard as if he could hardly believe the evidence of his ears. "Come," he said very gently, "let us take a turn in the garden. The air of this room is oppressive. Give me your arm, boy. This English winter finds out the weak places in an old man's joints."

As they paced the garden arm in arm, Richard (or Lionel—for Lionel it was, as the reader will long ago have surmised) went back to the topic he had last been talking about. "Were I to tell to a physician what I have just told you," he said, "he would simply put me down as the victim of a mental hallucination; he would tell me that I was suffering from a by no means uncommon form of cerebral excitement. So be it. I suppose I am the victim of a mental hallucination: but call it by what name you will, to me it is a most serious and terrible reality—a visitation that no medicines, no society, no change of scene, can alter or rid me of; that one thing alone can rid me of. When I have accomplished the bitter task that is appointed me to do, then, and then only, will this burden be lifted off my soul: then, and not till then, will Percy Osmond cease to visit me." Again he sighed deeply. The General pressed the arm that held his a little more tightly but did not speak. The case was beyond his simple skill. He was powerless to comfort or console the bruised spirit by his side. In silence they finished their walk.

But comfort and consolation were not altogether denied to Lionel

Dering. Edith, and she alone, had power to charm away the cloud from off his brow, the shadow from off his heart. For the time being, all his troubles and anxieties were forgotten. For a little while, when with her, he would seem like the Lionel Dering of other days: buoyant, hopeful, full of energy, and glad with the promise of the happy future before him. But when he had kissed her and said good-night, long before he reached Park Newton, the cloud would be back again as deep as before. The burden which, as he firmly believed, had been laid upon his shoulders seemed to grow heavier from day to day. "Oh that I could cast it from me!" he would often say to himself with a sort of anguish. "Why did I not go to the other side of the world at first? There peace and obscurity would have been mine. But it is too late now—too late!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. MACDERMOT WANTS HER MONEY.

SQUIRE CULPEPPER was laid up with an attack of his old enemy the gout. Thereby his temper was by no means improved. But to the ordinary pains which attend podagra was superadded another source of irritation and alarm. The shares of the Alcazar Silver Mining Company, in which promising speculation the Squire had invested the whole of his savings, had of late been going down slowly but steadily in the market. It was altogether unaccountable. They had no sooner reached the high-water point of value than they began to fall. But the difficulty had been to know when the high-water mark was reached. The Squire had bought at a low figure—at a remarkably low figure—and when, subsequently, the shares had risen so tremendously in value, he had often been tempted to sell out and realize. But the temptation to keep holding on, in the hope of being able to realize still larger profits, had hitherto proved the stronger of the two.

At first he had looked upon the decline as being merely one of those ordinary market fluctuations such as even the best securities are liable to at times. But at length he took alarm and wrote to his friend Mr. Bird, the secretary of the company, and the man who had persuaded him to invest so heavily in Alcazar securities.

To the Squire's letter Mr. Bird replied as under:

"My dear Mr. Culpepper,—Your note of yesterday did not surprise me in the least. I quite expected to hear from you some days ago respecting the fall in Alcazars. Several other shareholders have either written to me or seen me on the same subject. The truth is that the partisans of a rival company (a company, be it said, whose shares have never yet risen to par and are never likely to do so) have been doing their best to injure us by spreading abroad a report that a sudden eruption of water had put a stop to all our workings for an indefinite

length of time. The whole affair is an infamous canard, having no other object than to discredit us in the opinion of the public. Unfortunately it is next to impossible to bring such things home to any particular individual, but I have every reason to believe that one or two who are most deeply implicated in this scandalous affair have been buying heavily for the rise which is sure to take place in a few days from the present time ; and I strongly advise you, my dear sir, to follow their example. You cannot possibly do better. So satisfied am I on that point, that within the last few days I have invested every spare shilling of my own in Alcazars.

"In conclusion, I may just state that according to advices from our South American managers up to the latest date, received by me per last night's mail, the mine was never in so flourishing a condition as at the present moment.

"It is with the utmost confidence that I look forward to the declaration of a dividend and bonus equivalent in the gross to seventy five per cent, at the close of the current half-year.

"I remain, my dear Mr. Culpepper, very truly yours,

"THEODORE BIRD."

This letter allayed the Squire's fears and kept him quiet for several days. Strange to say, however, the Alcazars still kept steadily declining, and at length the old man became seriously alarmed. He wrote again to Mr. Bird, but this time there came no answer. For five days he waited in such a state of mental agony as he had never known before. He would have gone up to London himself, in order to see Mr. Bird, but by this time the gout had laid hold of him so severely that it was quite impossible for him to venture out of the house. What to do he knew not. No one, not even his daughter, knew how, or in what speculation, he had invested his money, and yet it was evident that he must now take some one into his confidence in the matter, or else be prepared to let the Alcazars go up or down at their own sweet will, and accept the result, whatever it might be, when he should be sufficiently recovered to attend to business himself. But in the face of matters, as they now stood, that was more than he could afford to do—it was more than he dare do. Where, then, was the person on whose honour, discretion, and good business knowledge he could safely rely to assist him in the dilemma in which he now found himself? He had employed five or six brokers at different times during the last eighteen months to buy stock for him, but he had no particular knowledge of, or confidence in, any of them. In Mr. Bird himself he had always placed the most implicit confidence, but that confidence had been severely shaken of late. Bird had originally been a protégé of his own, and had been placed by him as a junior clerk in Mr. Cope's bank. There he had remained for years, gradually

working his way up, and always very grateful to the Squire for the interest that he had taken in his welfare. Then came an advantageous removal to London, after which the Squire lost sight of him for several years. When he next turned up it was as secretary to the Alcazar Mining Company, and as promoter of several other speculative schemes, with a fine house in the Regent's Park, a capital cellar of wines, and a pair of steppers in his brougham that a duchess might have been proud of. The Squire went to dine with him. Mr. Bird did not fail delicately to insinuate that to Mr. Culpepper's generous kindness in giving him such an excellent start in life he attributed all his after success, and that the blessings by which he was now surrounded owed their origin to the Squire alone. Before the day was over, Mr. Culpepper had agreed to invest a very considerable sum in Alcazar stock.

Squire Culpepper's income, considering his position and influence, was anything but a large one. It amounted in all to very little more than three thousand a year. The estate itself was strictly entailed, all but one corner of it, which had been bought by the late Squire and added to it. It was in this corner that the present Squire had proposed to build his new mansion. But unless the Alcazar shares should rise very much again in public favour, there would be no funds forthcoming wherewith to build a new mansion, or even to repair the old one.

Out of this income of three thousand a year the Squire had always contrived to save something; and thus, little by little, he had gradually accumulated some twenty thousand pounds. This was to be Jane's dowry when she should marry. It was in the hope of being able to turn this twenty thousand into sixty or seventy thousand that had been his first inducement to speculate; and had he sold out when the Alcazars were at the flood-tide of their success, not only would this hope have been realized, but what to many had seemed an idle boast, that before long he would have built for him a new and a more magnificent Pincote, would have become a substantial reality.

These golden prospects, however, these magnificent castles in the air, had of late been losing their brightness and were fast resolving themselves into the misty cloud-land from which they had sprung. Very loth, indeed, was the Squire to let them go. Buoyed up by Mr. Bird's letter, he had deferred from day to day the painful act of selling out, still clinging with desperate tenacity to his cloudy battlements, and trying with all his might to believe that the frown which fortune had of late put on had been merely assumed to frighten him for a little while, and that behind it her golden smile was still lurking, and ready at any time to shine on him again.

But, by-and-by, there came a day when the Alcazars, still bent on going down, reached at one fell plunge a lower deep than they had ever dropped to before. Next morning they were quoted in the lists at

ten shillings per share less than they had been on the day when Squire Culpepper, allured by their fatal beauty, ventured on his first investment.

The London papers reached Pincote about luncheon time; and on this particular day the Squire, with his leg swathed in flannel, was just discussing a basin of chicken broth when the post came in. With eager fingers that trembled with excitement he tore off the wrapper, turned to the City article, and there read the fatal news. The blow was so stunning that for a little while he could scarcely realize it. He pushed away his basin of broth untasted. His head drooped into his hands, and bitter tears sprang to his eyes. For the first time since his wife's death the old man cried.

With his newspapers had come several letters, but they all lay untouched beside him for more than an hour. By-and-by he roused himself sufficiently from his abstraction to turn them listlessly over, and then to take them up one after another and stare at their superscriptions with glazed, incurious eyes. There was only one, and it was the last one that he took up, which roused his dull senses to any sign of recognition. "This must be from Fanny," he said. "I'd swear to her writing anywhere. All the way from Ems, too. Still as fond of those nauseous German waters as ever she was. No wonder she's never well." Then his thoughts reverted to his loss, and with a sigh he dropped the letter on the table.

Two or three minutes later a sudden colour flushed his cheeks, and with nervous fingers he sought on the table for the letter from Ems.

"She—she can't be writing for her money!" he said with a gasp. Then he tore open the letter. This is what he read therein :

"My dear Brother,—I hope that this will find you quite well, although you were never the man to give me the least credit for caring about your health. I hope to be in England in the course of another fortnight, when I shall at once make my way to Pincote. I presume that I shall not be looked upon as an intruder if I ask you to find me a bed for a few nights. Goodness knows it is not often I trouble you, and I am sure Jane must have many things to talk about to me, who am her nearest living female relative. As regards the five thousand pounds which I desired you to invest for me, or make use of in any way that might seem most desirable under the circumstances, I shall be glad if you will arrange to hand it over to me, together with any amount that may have accrued to it for interest, immediately upon my arrival at Pincote. I have decided to invest all my available funds in real estate: nothing else seems permanent and safe in these days of chances and changes. For my part, I sha'n't be a bit surprised if within the next ten years we see the guillotine as hard at work again as ever it was in the dreadful days of the First Revolution. I think it right to let

you know about the money so that you may be prepared. Give my love to Jane. I hope her hair is no longer that intolerable red that it used to be. The resources of art are many and various, and something could doubtless be done for her. But I must talk to her about all these matters when I see her, although I am afraid that nothing can ever make her pretty. Believe me your loving sister,

“FANNY McDERMOTT.

“P.S.—Don’t give me a bedroom that faces either the east or the north: and not too many stairs to climb.”

Jane Culpepper, coming into the room a quarter of an hour later, found her father lying in a sort of heap in his chair and quite unconscious. He was carried to bed; and Doctor Davidson was quickly on the spot. The attack, although sufficiently alarming, was pronounced to be not immediately dangerous, and in about a couple of hours the Squire had thoroughly recovered consciousness. His first words, whispered in Jane’s ear, were, “Send for young Bristow.” Jane could hardly believe that she had heard aright, and bent her head again that her father might repeat his words. Then, wondering greatly, she sent off a brief note to Tom, asking him to come up to Pincote with as little delay as possible. Two hours later Tom was there.

By this time the Squire was sufficiently recovered to be able to sit up in bed and talk in a feeble, querulous way, very different from his ordinary bluff, hearty style. Why he had sent for Tom he could not have told any one: he did not know himself. Tom’s name had sprung instinctively to his lips while he was yet only half conscious—a pretty sure proof that Tom’s image must have been in his thoughts previously.

“Bristow,” he said feebly as he held his hand out to Tom, “I want you to do me a favour.”

“You may command me, sir, in any and every way,” was Tom’s hearty answer.

“I have invested a considerable amount of money in the Alcazar Silver Mining Company.”

“Ah!” interjected Tom, and his face lengthened visibly.

“The shares have been going down for this month past—not that I have by any means lost confidence in them—and I want you to go up to London for me, being laid up myself with this cursed gout, and inquire personally into the stability of the concern. I won’t conceal from you that I am slightly anxious and uneasy, although I have Bird’s word for it—clever fellow, Bird, very: you ought to know him—that the present panic is merely a temporary affair, and that the shares will go up again, in a few days, higher than they have ever been yet. In any case, there can be no harm in your making a few private inquiries on my behalf, and reporting the result to me. You are not very busy, I



suppose, and you could go up to town—when?" His tone was very anxious as he asked this question.

"By the next train," answered Tom.

"Good boy—good boy!" said the Squire gratefully. "And you'll telegraph me, won't you? Don't wait to write, but telegraph to me."

"Don't think me impertinent if I ask you to tell me the extent of your liabilities as regards the Alcazar Mining Company."

"Why—ah—I cannot tell you to a fraction. A few thousands, I suppose. But I don't see how that fact can interest you."

Tom's long face grew still longer. "Don't you think, sir," he said, "that it might be advisable for you to empower me to sell out your stock in your behalf, should I find on inquiry to-morrow that there is the least likelihood of its sinking any lower than it is now?"

"Sell out!" exclaimed the Squire in horror. "Certainly not. What next, pray? Bird said the shares were sure to go up again, and I'll pin my faith to Bird through thick and thin."

It was with a sad heart that Tom left Pincote. He knew something of the Alcazar Mining Company and he had no faith in its stability. He knew something of Mr. Bird, the secretary, and he had no faith in his honesty.

Mrs. McDermott was Squire Culpepper's only sister. She had been a widow for several years. She was perpetually travelling about, ostensibly in search of health, but really in search of change and excitement. The money about which she was writing to her brother was a sum of five thousand pounds which she had put into his hands some two or three years previously, with a request that he would invest it for her in some way, or put it to whatever use he might deem most advisable. He had managed her monetary affairs for her ever since her husband's death, and there was nothing strange in such a request. At first the amount had been invested in railway debentures, which brought in a modest four per cent. But when the Alcazar shares began to rise so rapidly, it seemed to the Squire that he would have been wronging his sister had he neglected to let her participate in the wonderful golden harvest that lay so close to his hand. To have written to her on the subject would have been the merest matter of form. She would only have answered, "Don't bother me, but do as you like with the money till I want it for something else." Then what a glorious surprise it would be to her to find that her little fortune had actually trebled and quadrupled itself in so short a space of time! Nothing venture nothing win. The railway debentures were at once disposed of and Alcazar shares bought in their stead; and the Squire chuckled to himself many a time when he thought of his happy audacity in acting as he had done without consulting anyone except his friend Mr. Bird.

But in proportion to his previous exultation was the dread which now chilled his heart, that not only might his daughter's dowry be lost to her

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for ever, but that his sister's money also—the savings of many years—might be sunk beyond recovery in the wreck that now seemed so close at hand. Most people under such circumstances would have telegraphed to their brokers to sell out at every risk ; but there was a mixture of hopefulness and obstinacy in the Squire's disposition that made him cling to his purpose with a tenacity that would go far either to ruin him or make his fortune, as the case might be.

Tom Bristow did not reach London till long after business hours, but so anxious was he with regard to the matter which had taken him there, that he could not sit down comfortably and wait till morning before beginning his inquiries. After spending ten minutes at his hotel he took a hansom and drove off at once to the offices of the Alcazar Mining Company. The private watchman whose duty it was to look after the premises at night at once supplied him with Mr. Bird's address, and half an hour later Tom found himself in the neighbourhood of the Regent's Park. Mr. Bird's house was readily found, but Mr. Bird himself was not at home, as a rough-looking man with a short pipe in his mouth who, somewhat to Tom's surprise, answered his impatient knock, at once told him.

"Where is Mr. Bird, and when can I see him?" asked Tom.

"As to where he is—I should say that by this time he's some hundreds of miles on his way to America or Australia. As to when you can see him—why, you can see him when you can catch him and not before."

"Then he's gone?" said Tom incredulously.

"Yes, sir, he's gone. The nest's empty and the bird's flown," added the man with a grin at his own witticism ; "and the whole blessed concern has gone to smash."

"And the Squire will expect a telegram from me to-night!" muttered Tom.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### FOOTSTEPS IN THE ROOM.

DURING the few months that elapsed between the murder of Percy Osmond and the arrival of General St. George in England, Park Newton had been shut up, Pearce, the old family butler, being left as custodian of the house. Of the former establishment he was allowed to retain his niece, Miss Piper, who had been still-room maid, and Finch, formerly a footman, but afterwards promoted to be Mr. Dering's body-servant ; together with a woman or two to do the rough work of the house.

When the General fixed his home at Park Newton these people were all retained in their places, but their numbers were augmented by

eight or ten more. All his life the General had been used to be waited upon by a number of people, and he could not quite get out of the way of it even in England.

On a certain wintry evening early in the new year, Finch and Miss Piper were sitting in the drawing-room toasting their toes before a seasonable fire. Between them was a small table on which stood a decanter of Madeira and two glasses, together with a dish of apples, nuts, and oranges. The family had gone out to dinner, and would not be home till late; Mr. Pearce had driven into Duxley to pay the tradesmen's accounts, and for the time being Mr. Finch and his fair companion commanded the situation.

Miss Piper wore a dress of rustling plum-coloured silk. At her elbow was a smelling-bottle and a lace-edged handkerchief. Mr. Finch, with one of General St. George's snuff-boxes by his side, was lounging in his easy chair, with all the graceful nonchalance of an old club-man who has just partaken of an excellent dinner.

"This Madeira is not so bad," he said condescendingly, as he swallowed his third glass at a gulp with the gusto of a connoisseur. "Miss Piper," refilling his glass, "I look towards you. Here's your very good health. May you live long and die happy."

"Oh, Mr. Finch, deeply gratified, I'm sure."

"I must have fallen into a doze just now, because I never heard you when you opened the door, and was quite startled when I saw you standing beside me. But then you always do go about the house more quietly than anybody else—except the ghost himself."

Miss Piper glanced round with a shudder, and hitched her chair a little nearer the fire and Mr. Finch. "But surely, Mr. Finch," she said, "you are not one of those who believe that Park Newton is haunted? Uncle Pearce says that he never heard of such rubbish in the whole course of his life."

"Can a man doubt the evidence of his own senses, ma'am? I have lived in too many good families to have any imagination: I am matter-of-fact to the back-bone. Such being the case, what then? Why simply this, Miss Piper: that I know for a fact this house is haunted. Haven't I heard noises myself?"

"Gracious goodness! What kind of noises, Mr. Finch?"

"Why—er—rumblings and grumblings, and—er—moanings and scratchings. And haven't I woke up in the middle of the night, and sat up in bed, and listened and heard strange noises that couldn't be made by anything mortal? And then in the dusk of evening, haven't I seen the curtains move, and heard feet come pitter-pattering down the stairs; and far-away doors clash in the dark as if shut by ghostly hands? Dreadful, I assure you."

"You make me feel quite nervous!" cried Miss Piper, edging an inch nearer.

"The old clock on the second landing has never kept right time since the night of the murder. And didn't Mary Ryan swear that she saw Mr. Percy Osmond coming downstairs one evening, in his blood-stained shirt?—asking your pardon, Miss Piper, for mentioning such a garment before a lady. These are facts that can't be got over. But there's worse to follow."

"Whatever do you mean, Mr. Finch?"

"At first the house was haunted by one ghost, but now they do say there's two of them."

"Oh, lor! Two! And whose is the second one?"

"Why, whose ghost should it be but that of our late master, Mr. Lionel Dering? Five servants have left in six weeks, and I shall give warning next Saturday."

"My nerves are turning to jelly," returned Miss Piper. "Oh, Mr. Finch, we should be dull indeed at Park Newton if you were to go away!"

"Then why not go with me and make my life one long happiness? You know my feelings, you know that I —"

"No more of that, Mr. Finch, if you please. I know your feelings, and you know my sentiments. Nothing can ever change them. But don't let us talk any more nonsense. I want you to tell me about the ghosts."

"I don't know that I've much more to tell," said Finch, in a mortified tone.

"But about Mr. Dering—Mr. Lionel, I mean? Which of the servants was it that saw his ghost?"

"I am unable to give you any details, Miss Piper, as I never condescend to listen to the gossip of my inferiors; but I believe it to be the general talk in the servants' hall that the ghost of Mr. Lionel has been seen three or four times slowly pacing the big corridor by moonlight."

"How were the idiots to know that it was Mr. Lionel Dering?" asked Piper with a toss of the head. "Not one of them ever saw him when he was alive."

"Yes, Jane Minnows saw him in court during the trial, and she knew the ghost the moment she saw it."

"But then Jane Minnows was a terrible storyteller and just as likely as not to invent all about the ghost simply to get herself talked about. But tell me, Mr. Finch, have you not noticed the remarkable likeness that exists between Mr. Richard Dering and his poor brother?"

"As a gentleman of discernment, Miss Piper, I have noticed the likeness of which you speak. He has the very same nose, the very same hands, the very same way of sitting in his chair. And then the voice! I give you my word of honour that when Mr. Richard yesterday called out rather suddenly 'Finch,' you might have knocked me

down with a cork. It sounded for all the world as if my poor master had come back from the grave, and had called to me just as he used to do."

"You are not one of those, Mr. Finch, who believed in the guilt of Mr. Dering?"

"I never did believe in it and I never will to the last day of my life," said Finch sturdily. "No one, who knew Mr. Lionel as I knew him, could harbour such a thought for a single moment."

"Uncle Pearce says exactly the same as you say. 'No power on earth could make me believe it.' Them's his very words. But I say, Mr. Finch, isn't the old General a darling?"

"Yes, Miss Piper, I approve of the General—I approve of him very much indeed. But Mr. Kester St. George is a sort of person whom I would never condescend to engage as my employer. I don't like that gentleman. It seems a strange thing to say, but he has never looked his proper self since the night of the murder. His man tells me that he has to drench himself with brandy every morning before he can dress himself. Who knows? Perhaps it's the ghosts. They're enough to turn any man's brain."

"I know that I shouldn't like to go after dark anywhere near where the murder was done," said Miss Piper. "It's a good job they have nailed the door up. There's no getting either in or out of the room now."

"And yet they do say," remarked Finch, "that on the eighteenth of every month—you know the murder was done on the eighteenth of May—a little before midnight, footsteps can be heard—the noise of someone walking about in the nailed-up room. You, as the niece of Mr. Pearce, have not been told this, but it has been known to me all along."

"But you don't believe it, Mr. Finch?"

"Well I don't know so much about that," answered Finch, dubiously. "You see it was on account of them footsteps that Sims and Baker left last month. They had been told about the footsteps, and they made up their minds to go and hear them. They did hear them and they gave warning next day. They told Mr. Pearce that the place wasn't lively enough for them. But it was the footsteps that drove them away."

"After what you have told me I shall be frightened of moving out of my own room after dusk. Listen!" cried Miss Piper, jumping up in alarm. "That's uncle's ring at the side bell. He must have got back before his time."

It was as Finch had stated. Kester St. George was staying as his uncle's guest, at Park Newton. The General's letter found him at Paris, where he had been living of late almost en permanence. It was couched in such a style that he saw clearly if he were to refuse the

invitation thus given, a breach would be created between his uncle and himself which might never be healed in time to come ; and, distasteful as the idea of visiting Park Newton was to him, he was not the man to let any sentimental rubbish, as he himself would have been the first to call it, stand in the way of any possible advantage that might accrue to him hereafter. Rich though he was, he still hankered after his uncle's money-bags almost as keenly as in the days when he was so poor ; and in his uncle's letter there were one or two sentences which seemed to imply that the probability of their one day becoming his own was by no means so remote as he had at one time deemed it to be.

"And who has so much right to the old boy's savings as I have?" he asked himself. "Certainly not that scowling black-browed Richard Dering. I hope with all my heart that he'll be gone back to India—or to Jericho—or to the bottom of the sea—before I get to Park Newton."

But when he did reach Park Newton he found, greatly to his disgust, that Richard Dering was still there, and that there were no signs whatever of his speedy departure. That there was no love lost between the two men was evident both to themselves and others ; but although their coolness towards each other could hardly fail to be noticed by General St. George, he never made the slightest allusion to it, but treated them both as if they were the best of possible friends. Kester he treated with greater cordiality than he had ever accorded to him before.

Richard and Kester saw hardly anything of each other except at the dinner-table, and then the conversation between them was limited to the baldest possible topics. Richard never sat over his wine, and generally asked and obtained his uncle's permission to leave the table the moment dessert was placed upon it. He was an early riser, and had breakfasted and was out riding or walking long before his uncle or cousin made their appearance down stairs.

But these meetings over dinner, brief though they were, were to Kester like a dreadful oft-recurring nightmare which, although it may last for a minute or two only, murders sleep by the dread which it inspires before it comes, and the horror it leaves behind it after it has gone. Richard's voice, his eyes, the swing of his walk, the very pose of his head, were all so many reminders to Kester of a dead and gone man, the faintest recollection of whom he would fain have erased not from his own memory alone, but from that of every one else who had known him. But to hear Richard speak was to hear, as it were, Lionel speaking from the tomb.

General St. George made the delicate state of his health a plea for not seeing much company at Park Newton, nor did he visit much himself. But there was no such restriction on Kester, and he was out nearly every day at one place or another, though he generally contrived



to get back in time to dine with his uncle. He had not forgotten Dr. Bolus's advice, and for the last month or two he had been leading a very quiet life indeed. As a result of this, he fancied that there was a decided improvement in the state of his health. In any case he felt quite sure that the symptoms which had troubled him so much at one time troubled him less frequently now, and were milder at each recurrence. As a consequence, he had shrunk with a sort of morbid dread from seeking any further professional advice. He always felt the worst in a morning—so weak, nervous, and depressed when he woke up from the three or four hours of troubled sleep, which was all that Nature now could be persuaded to give him. Let him tire himself as he might, he never could get much more sleep than when he went to bed comparatively fresh, the consequence simply being that he was more weak and ill than usual next morning. For a little while he tried narcotics. But the remedy proved worse than the disease it was intended to cure. More sleep he got, it is true; but sleep so burdened with frightful dreams that it seemed to him as if it would be better to lie awake for ever, than run the risk of floating helplessly in such a sea of horrors any more.

As Finch had said, he had to dose himself heavily with brandy before he could dress and crawl downstairs to breakfast. But as the day wore on he always got stronger and better, so that by the time it was necessary to dress for dinner, he was quite like his old self again, as well seemingly and as buoyant as the Kester St. George of a dozen years before. It was the dark hours that tried him most, when he was left alone in his great gloomy bedroom, with a candle, and a book, and his own thoughts.

He had brought his valet with him to Park Newton. Not Pierre Janvard this time. Pierre had left Mr. St. George's service a little while previously, and had started business on his own account as an hotel keeper at Bath.

Mr. St. George's new valet was an Englishman named Dobbs. He was a well-trained servant—noiseless, deferential, smooth-spoken, and treating all his master's whims and capricious fluctuations of temper as the merest matter of course: a man who would allow himself to be sworn at, and called an idiot, an ass, the biggest blockhead in existence; and retaliate only with a faint smile of deprecation, and a gentle rubbing of his lean white hands.

Mr. St. George had a strange dislike to being left alone. When he could not have any other society—that is to say, early in the morning, and late at night after everybody else was in bed—he would rather have the company of Dobbs than that of his own thoughts only. In a morning between six and seven—long before daylight in winter—Dobbs was there in his master's room, arranging his clothes, laying out his dressing-case, mixing him his cup of chocolate, supplying him with his brandy,

doing anything—it did not matter what—so long as he was not out of his master's sight for many minutes at a time.

Then at night, late, when the old house was as quiet as a tomb, Mr. St. George would sit in his dressing-room, drinking cold brandy-and-water and smoking cigars till far into the small hours. It was Dobbs's duty at such times to sit with his master in a chair removed a few yards away and a little behind that of Mr. St. George. It was not that Kester wanted him there for conversational purposes, for he rarely condescended to speak to him except to ask him for something that he wanted. The man's silent presence was all that he required, and for such a duty as that Dobbs was invaluable. He never dozed—he would have sat up all night without closing an eye—he never read, he never sneezed or coughed, or made his presence objectionable in any way; and he never spoke unless first spoken to. Silent, watchful, and alert, he was always there and always the same.

Mr. St. George never slept without a light in his room, and Dobbs, who had a little sofa-bed in the dressing-room, and who was a remarkably light sleeper, was instructed to arouse his master at once should he hear the latter begin to toss about or moan in his sleep.

The eighteenth of January had come. Kester was beginning to think that it was about time his visit to Park Newton should be brought to a close. He had two horses in training at Chantilly on which he based some brilliant expectations, and his heart and thoughts were in the stable with his pets. Every day that he prolonged his stay at Park Newton merely served to deepen his hatred of the place. "I shall have a fit of horrors if I stay here much longer," he said to himself. "I'll invent some important business and try to get away the day after to-morrow. I must persuade the old boy to come and spend a month with me at Chantilly when the spring sets fairly in."

Dinner that day was quite an hour later than usual. General St. George had been to see an old friend who was ill, and he did not get back till late. Contrary to his usual practice, Richard Dering sat this evening with his uncle and cousin after the cloth was removed. He sat drinking his wine in an absent mood and scarcely joining in the conversation at all. By-and-by Pearce brought a note to the General on a salver. He put on his spectacles, opened the note, and read it. Then, with a little peevish exclamation, he tossed it into the fire.

"Another of them," he said. "We shall be left before long without a servant to wait on us. I certainly did not anticipate this annoyance when I came to live at Park Newton."

"What is the annoyance of which you speak?" asked Kester.

"Why, that fellow Finch has just given me notice that he intends to leave this day month. That will make the sixth of them, man or maid, that has left me since I came here; and I hear that the rest, old and new, are all likely to follow suit before long."

"You astonish me," said Kester. "You have always seemed to me the most indulgent of masters. If anything, too lenient—excuse me, sir, for saying so—and I can't understand at all why these idiots should want to leave you."

"Oh, it's not me they want to leave: it's the house doesn't suit them."

"The house! And what have they to complain of as regards the house?"

"They swear, every man jack of them, that it's haunted."

Kester's pale face became a shade paler. He fingered his empty wine glass nervously and did not answer for a little while.

"Park Newton haunted! What ridiculous nonsense is this?" he said at last with a forced laugh. "I lived in the house for years when I was a lad; but I certainly never knew before that it had so peculiar a reputation."

"It is only of late—only since the murder last May—that people have got into the way of saying these things."

Again Kester was silent. Richard Dering's keen glance was fixed on his face. He felt it rather than saw it. His under lip quivered slightly. He moved uneasily in his chair.

"What a parcel of blockheads these people must be!" he exclaimed at last. "Do we live in the nineteenth century, or have we gone back to the middle ages? If I were in your place, sir, I would send the whole lot packing, and have an entirely new set from London. It is only these superstitious country-bred louts who believe in such rubbish as ghosts: your thoroughbred Cockney has no faith in anything half so unsubstantial."

"It is certainly very singular," said the General, "that these idle fancies of weak brains should be so contagious. The first man who propagates the idea of a house being haunted has much to answer for. He never finds any lack of ready-made believers; and it is remarkable that we who know better, when we have a subject like this so persistently forced on our notice, come at last, quite unconsciously to ourselves and with no desire whatever to do so, to give a sort of half credence to it. We listen with a more attentive ear to statements so obstinately made, and emanating from so many different sources."

"My dear uncle," cried Kester, "you are surely never going to allow yourself to be converted into a believer in this wretched nonsense!"

"My dear Kester, I am not aware that I have ever been accounted as a superstitious man, and I don't think that I am going to become one so late in the day. I merely say that there is about these matters a certain degree of contagion which it is next to impossible altogether to resist."

Richard, who up to this point had taken no part in the conversation, now spoke. "From what I can make out," he said, "there seems to

be a strange coherence, a remarkable similarity, in the stories told by the different persons who profess to have seen these appearances. And now they are not content with saying that Park Newton is haunted by one ghost : they will have it that two of them have been seen of late."

"Two of them !" exclaimed the General and Kester in one breath.

"Aye, two of them," answered Richard. "One of them I need not name. The other one is said to be the ghost of my poor lost brother."

"What wretched fabrications are these !" exclaimed Kester. "Are you and I, sir," turning to the General, "to have our lives worried and our peace of mind broken by the babbling of a set of idiots, such as there unfortunately seems to be in this house?"

"They do not disturb my peace of mind, Kester."

"They do mine, sir. This house is my property—pardon me for mentioning the fact. Once let it acquire the unenviable reputation of being haunted, and for fifty years to come everybody will swear that it is so. Should you, sir, ever choose to leave the house, what chance shall I have of getting another tenant? None! With the reputation of being haunted, no one will live in it. Slowly but surely it will go to rack and ruin."

"It is hardly to be wondered at," said the General, "that these people have connected a tragedy so terrible, as that which will make Park Newton memorable for a century to come, with certain ghostly appearances. I myself find my thoughts dwelling upon the same thing very frequently indeed. What a strange, sad fate was that of poor young Osmond! Him I did not know. But in my dreams I am continually seeing the face of my poor lost boy whose fate was only one degree less sad. Do you never find yourself haunted in the same way, Kester?"

"Haunted, Uncle Arthur? That is a strange word to make use of. I have not forgotten my cousin, of course—nor am I likely ever to do so."

For a little while they all sat in silence. Nothing was heard save the crackling of the fire or the dropping of a cinder; or, now and then, the moaning of the wintry wind as it crept about the old house, trying the doors and windows, and seeming as though it were burdened with the weight of some terrible secret which it was striving to tell but could not.

Suddenly Richard Dering spoke. "This is the eighteenth of January," he said. "Eight months ago to-night, Percy Osmond was murdered, and under this very roof. To-night, at twelve o'clock, if what these people allege be true, footsteps will be heard—the noise of some one walking up and down the room where the murder was committed. Such being the case, what more easy than for us three to prove or disprove the accuracy of at least this part of the story? Why

not go, all three of us, a few minutes before twelve; and, accompanied by two or three of the servants who shall be chosen by the rest as a deputation, station ourselves close to the door of the nailed-up room, and there await the result? I do not for one moment anticipate that we shall either see or hear anything out of the ordinary way. Once let us prove this to the satisfaction of the servants, and I don't think that we shall be troubled with much more nonsense about ghostly footsteps or appearances at Park Newton."

"Not a bad idea, Dick, by any means," said the General. "What say you, Kester?"

Kester had pushed back his chair from the table while Richard was speaking. There was a strange look on his face: in his eyes terror, on his lips a derisive smile. He emptied his glass before answering.

"Faith, sir," he said, "it seems to me that you attach far too much importance to the cackling of these idiots. I would treat their assertions with the contempt they deserve, and send the whole crew about their business before they were two days older. Your presence there, as it seems to me, would be like a confession of your belief in the possible truth of certain statements: which are really so childish that no sensible person can treat them otherwise than with the most supreme contempt."

"I hardly agree with you there, Kester," said General St. George. "Our presence would be like a guarantee of good faith, and would set the question at rest at once and for ever. At all events, the plan is one which I mean to try, and I should like both of you to be there with me. Richard, you can arrange for certain of the servants to be ready a few minutes before midnight."

"Really, sir, I should feel obliged if you would excuse me from accompanying you," said Kester. "I have a bad headache to-night, and intend to get between the sheets as soon as possible."

"Pooh—pooh—pooh!" said the General, hastily. "I shall not excuse you. Hang your headaches! When I was a young fellow we left headaches to the women, and did not know what such things were ourselves. I have set my mind on having a game of backgammon with you this evening, and I shall not let you go."

His uncle's tone was so peremptory that Kester dared not say another word. He sat down again in silence.

At five minutes before twelve, they all met in the library—General St. George, Richard, Kester, and a deputation from the servants' hall, headed by Finch with a pair of lighted candles. Finch led the way through the cold and dismal passages, up the black oaken staircase, through the dreary picture gallery, where the portrait of each dead and gone St. George looked down inquiringly and seemed to ask the meaning of so strange a procession; and so at last they reached the

door of the nailed-up room. Finch deposited his candles on the nearest window-sill, and by their dim, uncertain light, the company grouped themselves round the door, the servants a little way behind their superiors, and waited. No one spoke: no one wanted to speak. They were thinking of the dark tragedy that, but a few short months before, and in the dead of night, had been enacted behind that shut-up door. Presently the turret-clock began to strike. Slowly and lingeringly it tolled, as if unwilling to let the dying day drop into its grave. Over all there, a deeper hush fell. Twelve solemn strokes, and then silence and another day.

Silence for, perhaps, the space of half a minute; when, with an indescribable awe, they heard, one and all, a slight noise, as of a chair being pushed back; and the next moment came the sound, clear, distinct, and unmistakable, of footsteps slowly pacing the bare, polished floor of the nailed-up room. The servants all shrank back a little, and turned their white and frightened faces on one another. Kester St. George, too, staggered back a step or two and leaned for support against an angle of the wall.

Even at that supreme moment he could feel that the cold, stern eyes of Richard Dering were fixed on his face, and he hated him with a hatred like death.

Hardly breathing, they all listened, while the footsteps slowly, unhesitatingly, paced the room. Suddenly they heard another sound which several there present at once recognised. What they heard was the noise of a man coughing; and the cough they heard was the short, dry, grating cough that had been peculiar to Mr. Percy Osmond, and to him alone. Finch recognised it in a moment. So did Kester St. George: who, with a quick cry of pain, pressed his hand to his heart, and staggering back a pace or two, fell to the ground in a dead faint.

*(To be continued.)*



## MADAME COTTIN.

MANY of those writers who, by their mimic world of fiction, have thrilled men and women with horror or pity, have led lives differing as much from the lives of their ideal personages as the course of a sluggish stream creeping through flat green fields in a midland county differs from the course of a Highland brook which dashes over precipices, and darts through deep ravines, and tosses up in the sunlight clouds of diamond spray. Mrs. Ratcliffe, who, seventy years ago, peopled the dreams of the fashionable world with shadowy forms gliding along gloomy corridors, and assassins stealing at dead of night through postern doors, was in daily life the brightest and cheeriest of women. She wrote her terrible romances at an English fireside, with her husband, a merry, commonplace man, with whom she spent many merry commonplace years, sitting opposite her, and never, from the beginning to the end of her days, beheld an Italian Palazzo or an Alpine peak. Samuel Richardson, who drew such showers of tears from bright eyes over the protracted sorrows of his "Clarissa," was a stout, jolly little man, who loved nothing so much as tea and toast in a back parlour. The distinguished Frenchwoman, however, whose name stands at the head of these pages, was in this respect a striking contrast to many of her brothers and sisters in art. Her life was as full of romantic incident as that of the heroines of her novels, and for this reason, as well as for her high position in French literature, we take interest in telling her story.

About the year 1785, one of the richest and best known merchants of Bordeaux was M. Resteaud. He was a man of much wealth, but more ostentation; a man of cool, shrewd brain, but a fiery Southern temperament, a man who loved well his elegant ease in his splendidly furnished salon, but who loved still better the feverish joys of monied speculation. His wife was a pretty blonde, made up in about equal parts of imagination, sentiment, and heart.

The pair loved each other with a love not too common in those days between married couples in France, and the tie was rendered closer and dearer by their only child, a daughter called Sophia. At the time when our story begins Sophia Resteaud was a rapidly developing girl of thirteen, with a face which, without being absolutely handsome, was charming from its mobile, April-like changefulness of expression; with an inborn sense of grace and beauty which revealed itself in every fold of her dress, in every chord she drew from the strings of her harp, in every inflection of her voice when she read or recited; with a fancy already ripe for flirtation; with a half-written novel already lurking among the Italian exercises at the bottom of her desk.

At this period there came to M. Resteaud's house a certain Parisian banker, named Auguste Cottin. M. Resteaud had borrowed from him for some of his speculations a large sum of money, and thinking perhaps that payment came somewhat slowly, the banker now appeared to demand its return. Auguste Cottin was a handsome man of thirty. He had a pretty amateur taste in art and literature, a faculty for falling in love with half a dozen women at once, a vast fortune, a thousand and one whims and caprices, but at the bottom of all a kindly heart.

There were two things which struck Cottin in M. Resteaud's house. One was the embarrassed manner of the merchant as he asked him to come again to-morrow for his money; the other was the naive grace of Sophia, as unknown to herself, he watched and listened to her through the trees in the garden, while she repeated to her mother a scene from Racine. After a little time Cottin revealed himself, together with Sophia's father, who had been a party to the little deception. Auguste Cottin exchanged a few friendly words chiefly expressive of his admiration for Sophia with the mother and daughter, and then left them with a feeling of deep interest.

That evening as the banker sat in his hotel, thinking, perhaps, of bright louis d'or; perhaps, who knows, of brighter hair; the door suddenly opened and a slight, veiled female figure glided into the room. An instant after the mysterious visitor was at Auguste Cottin's feet. He started up in surprise, for now the hood was thrown back and revealed the face of Sophia Resteaud. There she knelt with the crimson glow of girlish shyness tinging her cheeks, with a whole world of conflicting feelings in her eyes, with her hands stretched towards him in silent entreaty. Wonderingly, tenderly he raised her, and made her sit beside him. Then in broken words she told for what she had come. She and her mother had learned by secret but sure means that M. Resteaud was a bankrupt, and was about to destroy himself. There seemed to the agonized wife and daughter but one hope, and that was that the banker should forgive him his debt, or, at least, postpone payment to some distant day. Auguste Cottin's mind was quickly made up. That pleading young face and the generous impulses of his heart at once prevailed. The debt was forgiven entirely and for ever. M. Resteaud's life and credit were saved. The banker received the sweet homage of the pretty mother and charming little daughter and then went back to Paris, on the whole well pleased with what he had done; for though his generosity had for a time somewhat straitened his means, he had still a large capital which skilful management would soon again double.

Two years now passed away—two years, during which Sophia's form grew taller and less childlike, and the torch of intellect kindled more brightly in her eyes, and new treasures were revealed in her mind and heart. Her reading was, for a girl of her age, wonderfully deep

and universal. Fancy indulged in many a dream as she half slumbered in the shade of the garden, and we need not ask who was the hero of her dreams. Little stories and poems fell from her pen as lightly and easily as petals from a full-blown rose; but these were for no eyes save those of her mother and her governess. Her father had a fixed idea that a woman's place is at the embroidery frame, in the kitchen, in the salon fascinating men, but not in print before the public; and he therefore carefully checked and discouraged Sophia's literary aspirations. It was probably this early influence of her father which made the authoress of "*Mathilde*" so reluctant in letting her genius shine forth to the world. Her mother, like the good wife that she was, followed in a great measure her husband's lead, but still she could not help smiling and looking pleased as she watched the girl's face at her writing-table.

But what was Auguste Cottin about all this while? He was building up a yet more princely fortune than before. He was giving petits soupers which were as fabulous banquets to the crowd of unlucky outsiders who never passed behind the veil into the Holy of Holies of the rich banker's favour. He was exchanging love tokens with half the ladies in Paris. This latter dangerous game he carried on till at last, without exactly knowing how, he found that he had drifted into an engagement of marriage with Blanche de Florigny, who had as many noble ancestors as the banker had millions; whose laugh was the boldest at carnival or masked ball; who trod on talons rouges at religious ceremonies and in court processions with more dignified grace than any woman in France. Yet even amid the golden tumult of the money-market, even when the summer lightning of wit played brightest round the supper table—yes, even when he sat beside his splendid betrothed, there would often rise up before him the picture of a sweet imploring face, a soft voice pleading for a father's life would echo in his ear.

Engaged though he was to be married, M. Cottin seemed in no haste to bring nearer the happy day. Madlle. de Florigny vaguely suspected that all was not right, but was too proud to press him on the point. At length, one day he declared to her that he had formed an intention to make a tour in foreign lands before he settled down as a married man. The young lady at first expostulated a little, but quickly retired into the haughtiness of the grande dame, and let him go his own way. For a time, therefore, Paris saw no more of the rich banker, and London and Brussels were treated to a view of his fine horses and splendid liveries.

Before he went, however, influenced by some mysterious power which was certainly not the power of his fair Blanche's eyes, he wrote to M. and Madame Resteaud, with whom he had always kept up a friendly correspondence, and asked them if they would like, during his

absence, to inhabit his house in Paris. Glad enough to get a holiday in the capital so cheaply, the merchant's family at once acted on his proposal, and were soon installed in the stately Hôtel Cottin.

That first visit to Paris must have been a wonderful waking-up for Sophia. What fresh combinations of character she must have found in the new class of men and women around her; what richness of colouring in the crowded streets. What strains of music, hitherto only heard in dreams, must have thrilled her soul at opera or concert; for though Bordeaux was a large provincial town, it was in many points, especially those of art, far behind the capital.

After he had been away for some months Auguste Cottin began to find an inexplicable and strong longing growing up within him to know how his friends from the provinces were getting on in his Parisian house. This desire at length became so irresistible that, without ever having written to tell the Resteauds his intention, he one evening came back to Paris, followed only by a single servant. Passing through the town as quietly as possible, as he drew near his house, he saw from the number of carriages, and the bustle of servants around the door, that M. and Madame Resteaud must be receiving a large party that night. Thinking that it might embarrass his friends if he announced himself to them at such a moment, he turned aside to a small door which led into a suite of rooms he used formerly to occupy. On he wandered, from one dimly lit apartment to another, among glimmering busts and china and the heavy perfumes of flowers. Here all was still, for the grand reception rooms were at the other end of the house. There only now and then reached his ear a strain of distant music, or the far-off roll of a carriage.

At length he came to the door of his own little private library. From beneath it there streamed out a bright light. He paused for a moment, but thinking all the Resteaud family must surely be engaged with their guests, soon entered. On the threshold he stood still with a low cry of surprise. There, in the full light of a crystal lamp which hung from the ceiling lay Sophia asleep on a sofa. The scattered sunbeams of her hair lying on the pillow framed with shimmering gold her face, where childhood still smiled in the softly rounded cheek, but womanhood sat already enthroned on the brow, thoughtful even in slumber. Her little hand held loosely a book which lay on her lap, In every fold of her dress, in every flexible limb, there was the careless grace of perfect rest. A headache had kept her that evening from helping her parents to receive their guests. But instead of going to bed she had sat up reading, and sleep had stolen upon the tired girl before she was well aware of it. From that sleep she was aroused by Auguste Cottin's lips upon her hand.

Who can doubt the result of that night's sudden meeting? A few weeks after, Cottin had a long interview with Madlle. de Florigny, which

ended in their engagement being broken off. The young lady let him go with a toss and a smile. But the poor girl must have shed many a tear in secret, for her passion for Auguste Cottin tinged, as we shall see, the whole of her short, sad life.

Soon after that the engagement between M. Cottin and Madlle. Resteaud was made public. It was a love match in the true sense of the good old phrase. In Sophia's heart there had already grown up for Auguste a love which was to bloom on in spite of rough winds and nipping frosts until that heart had ceased to beat. As for Blanche de Florigny's faithless suitor, he certainly at this time believed that no other being upon earth, except his sweet child bride, could make the sunshine of his life.

Soon after their daughter's betrothal M. and Madame Resteaud took her back to Bordeaux, where the wedding was to take place. The pair were married very quietly late one evening in a room at the bride's home, following the custom usual at that time in the South of France among the higher classes. The ceremony was hardly over, and the parents had scarcely had time to bless their daughter, when suddenly there rang through the house the cry of "Fire, fire." Out rushed the startled father and bridegroom, to see the frightened servants hurrying about in wild confusion, and to meet a stifling cloud of smoke, which told that the alarm was but too true, rolling up the passage. Half dead with terror, Sophia was carried by her husband from the scene of danger, and as they passed down the street to a neighbour's house, where he placed her in safety, the blazing home of her childhood was their nuptial torch. How the fire broke out was never exactly known. Some said it was an accident, some that it was an act of revenge on the part of a cousin of Madlle. Resteaud's, who had hoped for her hand. Be that as it might, it was a sinister omen for a wedding-day. M. Resteaud lost much by the fire and was again indebted to his son-in-law for pecuniary help.

Soon after her marriage the young girl began to find that being exalted from a Madlle. into a Madame was not exactly being raised from a terrestrial into a celestial Paradise.

It was M. Cottin's ambition to gather together at his house all that was most distinguished among the rank and talent of Paris, and to that end he worked most industriously. Rich and handsome though he was, it was certainly a difficult undertaking for a banker in those exclusive days in France, and no doubt he looked to his wife to be a help-meet for him in these efforts. He wished her to be the very star of his splendid parties; to go about among his guests radiant in silks and jewels, dropping here a smile and there a gracious word, dazzling by turns with her wit and with her beauty.

To shine, however, in large assemblies was exactly what Sophia Cottin could not do. Her figure and face, though attractive, were pre-

cisely the kind of figure and face which don't pay for dressing. However much her lady's-maid laboured to turn her into a tulip, she was sure, after all, to be still a wood-violet. She always seemed one of the simplest and least important people at her own parties, and her natural shyness made matters worse. She was silent and constrained among a crowd of mere acquaintances, and now and then even sinned so far against the canons of politeness as to slip away to solitude and her beloved books before the evening was half over, and leave her guests to entertain each other.

Once to please her husband she so far overcame her natural disposition as to read aloud to a large party, after the manner of Madame de Staël, a few chapters of a half-finished novel. But the performance, principally no doubt from the timidity of the authoress, does not seem to have been a success. The assembled gentlemen and ladies applauded as in duty bound, but the experiment was not again tried.

All this put M. Cottin out of conceit with his young wife. She was pretty and clever it was true, but then what was the use of her being either if she did not let the world know it? She was as bad as the bird of old renown who could sing and would not. After awhile he began to look about for other women who were pretty and clever as well as Sophia, and who had not the least objection to himself and all Paris knowing it. There were many such, and Blanche de Flornigny was one of them. She had never ceased to love Auguste Cottin. Her principles in the hour of temptation proved to be as low as her birth was high, and before long she drew M. Cottin into a close liaison.

Sophia's attitude at this time was most womanly and dignified. She still loved her husband in spite of his shortcomings towards her, and treated him with the same gentle equable affection as ever. She strove to forget herself in study and the bright work of her pen. She had by this time in her desk a completed and carefully-polished novel, but still influenced by the feeling against female authorship breathed into her by her father, she did not think of publication.

Troubles now came fast and thick on Madame Cottin. First she watched by the death beds of both her parents, who passed away quickly soon after each other. Then her husband fell into bad health, and, after a lingering illness, died, owning his sins against her and tenderly nursed by her to the last. She mourned him bitterly, yet still bore the blow with brave resignation. Before she was twenty she was thus left a widow.

Next the storm of the French Revolution swept past her and carried away with it the greater part of her fortune. The woman who had once been the mistress of the most splendid salon in Paris now sat in a small, scantily-furnished room which looked into a back street, and gained her living, together with an old servant, her only companion, by embroidery, in which she was very skilled.



Among the first victims of the guillotine was Madlle. de Florigny. The night before her execution Madame Cottin stood in her cell. She came on a noble Christian mission, to assure her rival of her forgiveness, and to help the erring woman (in those days, when priestly comfort was denied to the condemned) to reconcile herself with God. There was a short, touching scene between the two women. Blanche de Florigny was penitent and resigned, and died next day on the scaffold bravely, like the true daughter of the race of warriors from which she sprang.

One day, when the fury of the revolution was at its height, Madame Cottin and her servant were sitting at work, when suddenly a man rushed into the room and fell fainting into a chair. He was a venerable looking old man, whose appearance at once excited Madame Cottin's pity and interest. Though startled, she and her servant busied themselves with careful womanly skill about the stranger, and soon he revived. When he began to recover, the word gentleman, in the full meaning of that word then in France, was apparent in his every tone and movement, in his graceful yet somewhat formal language, in his gallant respectful manner towards the lady, in the stately carriage of his well-shaped old head. Madame Cottin now became convinced that he was a proscribed person seeking shelter, but forbore asking him any question till he had satisfied the hunger which, though he was too much of a gentleman to say so, was evidently the chief cause of his weakness. When he grew a little stronger, he told her that he was a Marquis, and an old friend of her father, and that the bloodhounds of the Republic were on his track. Scarcely had the words passed his lips when there was a loud knock at the door, and the terrible words, "Open in the name of the Republic," rang through the room.

They gazed at each other in voiceless horror. There seemed no escape; yet still Sophia Cottin quickly resolved that her father's friend should not perish without an effort to save him. She hastily ensconced the old man behind the large heavy window curtain, seated herself with the back of her chair close against it with a book in her hand, signed to the servant to keep calm, and then, gathering together all the quiet courage of which she had a considerable store beneath her shyness of manner, bade the men enter, in a steady voice.

"Is there not a man here?" asked the leader of the band.

"A man," cried Madame Cottin, looking up with the most innocent surprise from her book.

"A man," repeated the old servant, trying to be very busy at the stove.

The quiet carelessness of the two women at once somewhat blunted suspicion, but the officers of the Republic knew well enough that they could not always, when they visited a house, trust to outward appearances, and so they searched the little sitting-room and the neighbouring

bedroom from end to end. All the while Madame Cottin never moved or raised her eyes from her book. Those were fearful minutes. She could hear the low breathing of the poor old man behind her. She felt that her slight figure was the only barrier between him and destruction. She knew that a game of hazard was being played, in which the stake was a human life. The men had now come back to the door by which they had entered, without disturbing Madame Cottin's seat. Probably such cool audacity as hers had never come into the minds of even such practical detectives as they were.

"Bon soir, citoyenne," said the chief bloodhound with surly civility, and then they all left the room.

The Marquis was safe for the present, but what now was to be done with him. His object was, if possible, to escape to America, where he had many relations and friends, but he had not a sou in his pocket, and how was he to take that long journey without money? Madame Cottin shook out her purse. There were only a few francs in it. She looked into her jewel-case. There was not so much as a garnet left. She glanced towards the little side-board. There was nothing but German silver upon it. Suddenly the remembrance of the MS. in her desk flashed through her mind. Yes, that might be a saleable article, at least she would try if it was. Surely even the spirit of her father would bless this effort to help a friendless old man.

It was a dark evening of drizzling rain when Madame Cottin, followed only by her old servant, went out, MS. in hand. The lamps in the streets flickered fitfully. Wild gusts of wind came moaning down the side alleys. As they crossed one fatal square, they could see the outline of the guillotine against the ashy grey background of the sky. It was not a cheering walk for the poor young authoress.

She turned into one publisher, who gave her a half-contemptuous, half-pitying smile, as a young lady not quite right in her head. She turned into a second one, who, being out of humour, dismissed her as he might have done a peasant woman with stale eggs. She turned into a third, who groaned over the times, and lamented that he could not keep himself afloat, let alone an unknown author.

"Let us go home, Madame," said the old servant wearily; but Madame would not go home. They went now into a small publisher's, in a less frequented part of the town. Here the business was managed by a woman in a widow's dress, like Sophia's own. The livery of sorrow drew the two towards each other. The woman soon became certain that Madame Cottin wanted to earn money for some good purpose, and this thought, together with the young authoress's sweet, anxious face, interested her. She bade her leave her MS., saying that her brother-in-law should read it, and that if he liked it, she would send her some money for it next morning. Madame Cottin departed comforted, but still trembling. That was a night of long suspense for poor

Sophia. The old man's life depended on her MS., and besides, she had her fears and palpitations as an authoress. Next morning, however, there came a complimentary letter from the publisher, containing a few hundred francs, and promising more if the book succeeded. With that money the Marquis managed to escape in safety, and lived to bless Sophia Cottin on the American shores.

Some months after, when order was restored in France, Madame Cottin's first novel, "*Claire D'Albe*," came out, and soon made its way into public favour, bringing its writer both fame and money. Her other novels then soon followed in quick succession. They were all popular in their day; but the only two that have lived are "*Mathilde*," which, from its grace of style and its skilfully worked-up interest, will always be a favourite with cultivated readers; and "*Elizabeth; or the Exiles of Siberia*," which, from the simple pathos of its story, has become in translations a household volume in most European homes.

The money made by her writings, and the restoration of part of her fortune, enabled Madame Cottin to live again in a good house in the best part of Paris. She saw much society in her own quiet way, and kept a sort of little literary court. She never married again. Her heart still clung to the memory of the husband of her youth. She had, however, a train of lovers with whom she carried on a good deal of sentimental flirting. Two of her adorers even went so far as to blow their brains out for her sake. The fashionable authoress was a very different person from the banker's little wife of old days.

Madame Cottin was never mixed up with the stormy politics of the day, nor was she the least tainted with the religious scepticism then so widely spread through France. She was always an earnest Roman Catholic. She did not long live to enjoy her literary fame. Her early troubles and her mental work had weakened her constitution, and at thirty she died, leaving a name precious to the women of France.

ALICE KING.



## HESTER REED'S PILLS.

"**H**OW are the babies, Hester?"

Mrs. Todhetley was passing the gate of George Reed's cottage, and stopped to put the question. Hester Reed, sunning her cap and clean cotton gown in the garden, the three elder children around, watering the beds with a doll's watering-pot, and a baby hiding its face on her shoulder, dropped a curtsey as she answered.

"They be but poorly, ma'am, thank you. Look up, Susy," turning the baby's face upwards to show it: and a pale mite of a face it was, with sleepy eyes. "For a day or two past they've not seemed the thing; and they be both cross."

"I should think their teeth are troubling them, Hester."

"Maybe, ma'am. I shouldn't wonder. Hetty, she seems worse than Susy. She's a-lying there in the basket indoors. Would you please spare a minute to step in and look at her, ma'am."

Mrs. Todhetley opened the gate. "I may as well go in and see, Johnny," she said to me in an undertone. "I fear they are both rather sickly."

Easter was that year very nearly as late as it can be. This brought the time, you know, towards the end of April: and, to judge by the weather, it might have been the end of May, the days were so warm and glorious.

Tod and I were at home for the short holidays, at Dyke Manor. This was Easter Tuesday. The Squire and Tod had gone riding over to old Jacobson's. I, having nothing else to do, got the Mater to come with me for a practice on the church organ; and we were taking the round home again through the village.

The other baby, "Hetty," lay in the kitchen in a clothes basket. It had just the same sort of puny white face as its sister. These two were twins, and about a year old. When they were born, Church Dykely went on finely at Hester Reed, asking her if she would not have had enough with one new child but she must go and set up two.

"It does seem very poorly," remarked Mrs. Todhetley, stooping over the young mortal (which was not cross just now, but very still and quiet), and letting it clasp its little fist round one of her fingers. "No doubt it is the teeth. If the children do not get better soon, I think, were I you, Hester, I should speak to Mr. Duffham."

The advice seemed to strike Hester Reed all of a heap. "Speak to him! To Dr. Duffham!" she exclaimed. "Why, ma'am, they must both be a good deal worse than they be, afore we does that. I'll give 'em a dose o' mild physic apiece; I daresay that'll bring 'em round."

"I should think it would not hurt them," assented Mrs. Todhetley. "They both seem feverish; this one especially. I hear you have had Cathy over," she went on, passing to another subject.

"Sure enough us have," said Mrs. Reed. "She come over yesterday was a week and stayed till Friday night."

"And what is she doing now?"

"Well, ma'am, Cathy's keeping herself; and that's something. She has got a place at Tewkesbury to serve in some shop; is quite in clover there by all accounts. Two good gowns she brought over to her back; and she's pretty nigh as light-hearted as she was afore she went off to enter on her first troubles."

"Hannah told me she was not looking well."

"She have had a nasty attack of—what was it?—neuralgy, I think she called it, and been obliged to go to a doctor," answered Hester Reed. "That's why they gave her the holiday. She was very well while she was here."

I had stood at the door, talking to the little ones and their watering-pot. As the Mater was taking her last final word with Mrs. Reed, I went on to hold open the gate for her, when some woman whisked round the corner from Piefinch Lane, and in at the gate.

"Thank ye, sir," said she to me: as if I had been holding it open for her especial benefit.

It was Ann Dovey, the blacksmith's wife down Piefinch Cut: a smart young woman fond of fine gowns and caps. Mrs. Todhetley came away and Ann Dovey went in. And this is what passed at Reed's—as leaked out to the world afterwards.

The baby in the basket began to cry, and Ann Dovey lifted it out and took it on her lap. She understood all about children, having been the eldest of a numerous flock at home, and was no doubt all the fonder of them because she had none of her own. Mrs. Dovey was moreover a great gossip, liking to have as many fingers in her neighbours' pies as she could conveniently get in.

"And now what's amiss with these here two twins?" asked she in a confidential tone, bending her face forward till it nearly touched Mrs. Reed's, who had sat down opposite to her with the other baby. "Sarah Tanken, passing our shop just now, told me they warn't the thing at all, so I thought I'd run round."

"Sarah Tanken looked in while I was a-washing up after dinner, and saw 'em both," assented Mrs. Reed. "Hetty's the worst of the two; more pecky like."

"Which *is* Hetty?" demanded Ann Dovey; who, with all her neighbourly visits, had not learnt to distinguish the two apart.

"That one that you be a nursing."

"Did the mistress of the Manor look at 'em?—I see her a coming out of here."

"She come in for that. She thinks I'd better give 'em both some mild physic. Leastways, I said a dose might bring 'em round," added Hester Reed, correcting herself, "and she said, Yes, it might."

"It's the very thing for 'em, Hester Reed," pronounced Mrs. Dovey, decisively. "There's nothing like a dose of physic for little ones: it often stops a bout of illness. You give it to them; and don't lose no time. Grey powder's best."

"I've not got any grey powder by me," said Mrs. Reed. "It crossed my mind to try 'em with one o' them pills I had from Abel Crew."

"What pills be they?"

"Some I had from him for myself the beginning o' the year, when I was getting the headache so much. They be as mild as mild can be; but they did me good. The box is upstairs."

"How do you know they'd be the right pills to give to babies?" sensibly questioned Mrs. Dovey.

"Oh, they be right enough for that. When little Georgy was poorly two or three weeks back, I ran out to Abel Crew, chancing to see him go by the gate, and asked whether one of his pills would do the child harm. He said No, it would do him good."

"And did it get him round?"

"I never gave it. Georgy seemed to be so much pearter afore night came, that I thought I'd wait till the morrow. He's a rare bad one to take physic, he is. You may cover a powder in treacle that thick, Ann Dovey, but the boy scents it out somehow, and can't be got to touch it. His father always has to make him; I can't. He got well that time without the pill."

"Well, I should try the pills on the two little twins," advised Ann Dovey. "I'm sure they want something o' the sort. Look at this one! lying like a lamb in my arms, staring up at me with its poor eyes and never moving. You may always know when a child's ill by its quietness. Nothing ailing 'em, they worry the life out of you."

"Both of them were cross enough this morning," remarked Hester Reed, "and for that reason I know they be worse. I'll try the pill to-night."

Now, whether it was that Ann Dovey had any especial love for presiding at the ceremony of administering pills to children, or whether she only looked in again incidentally in passing, certain it was, that in the evening she was for the second time at George Reed's cottage. Mrs. Reed had put the three elder ones to bed; or, as she expressed it, got 'em out o' the way; and was undressing the twins by firelight, when Ann Dovey tripped into the kitchen. George Reed was at work in the front garden, digging; though it was getting almost too dark to see where he inserted the spade.

"Have ye give 'em their physic yet?" was Mrs. Dovey's salutation.

"No, but I'm a-going to," answered Hester Reed. "You be just



come in time to hold 'em for me, Ann Dovey, while I go upstairs for the box."

Ann Dovey received the pair of babies, and sat down in Mrs. Reed's chair. Taking the candle, Mrs. Reed ran upstairs to the room where the elder children slept. The house was better furnished than cottages generally are, and the rooms were of a fairly good size. Opposite the bed stood a high deal press with a flat top, which Mrs. Reed made a shelf of, for keeping things that must be out of the children's reach. Stepping on a chair, she put her hand out for the box of pills, which stood in its usual place near the corner; and went downstairs with it.

It was an ordinary paste-board pill-box, containing a few pills—six or seven, perhaps. Mrs. Dovey, curious in all matters, lifted the lid and smelt at the pills. Hester Reed was getting the moist sugar they were to be administered in.

"What did you have these here pills for?" questioned Ann Dovey, as Mrs. Reed came back with the sugar. "They bain't over big."

"For headache, chiefly, and pain in the side. I asked old Abel Crew if he could give me something for it, and he gave me these pills."

Mrs. Reed was moistening a teaspoonful of the sugar as she spoke. Taking out one of the pills she proceeded to press it into little bits, and then mixed it with the sugar. It formed a kind of paste. Dose the first.

"That ain't moist enough, Hester Reed," pronounced Mrs. Dovey, critically.

"No? I'll put a drop more warm water."

The water was added, and one of the children was fed with the delectable compound—Hetty. Mrs. Dovey spoke again.

"Is it all for her? Won't a whole pill be too much for one, d'ye think?"

"Not a bit. When I asked old Abel whether one pill would be too much for Georgy, he said No—two wouldn't hurt him. I tell ye, Ann Dovey, they be as mild as milk."

Hetty sucked in the whole dose by degrees. Susy had a similar one made ready, and swallowed it in her turn. Then the two babies were conveyed upstairs and put to bed side by side in their mother's room.

Mrs. Dovey, the ceremony being over, took her departure. George Reed came in to his early supper, and soon afterwards he and his wife went up to bed. Men who have to be up at five in the morning, must go to rest betimes. The fire and candle were put out, the doors locked, and the cottage was steeped in quietness at a time when in larger houses the evening was not much more than beginning.

How long she slept, Mrs. Reed could not tell. Whether it might be the first part of the night, early or late, or whether morning might

be close upon the dawn, she knew not ; but she was startled out of her sleep by the cries of the babies. Awful cries, they seemed, coming from children so young ; and there could be no mistake that each of them was in terrible agony.

"Why, it's convulsions !" exclaimed George Reed. "Both of them, too !"

Going downstairs as he was, he hastily lighted the kitchen fire and put a kettle of water on. Then, dressing himself, he ran out for Mr. Duffham. A little delay, and the doctor came ; ten minutes, or so, after George Reed had got back again.

Duffham was accustomed to scenes, and he entered on one now. Mrs. Reed, in a state of distress, had put the babies in blankets and brought them down to the kitchen fire : the three elder children, aroused out of bed by the cries, were standing about in their night clothes, crying with fright. One of the babies was dead—Hetty. She had just expired in her father's arms. The other was dying.

"What on earth have you been giving to these children ?" exclaimed Duffham, after taking a good look at the two.

"Oh, sir, what is it, please?" sobbed Mrs. Reed in her terror. "Convulsions?"

"Convulsions—no," said the doctor, in a fume. "It is something else : as I believe—Poison." At which she set up a shriek that might have been heard out of doors.

Well, Hetty was dead, I say : and Duffham could not do anything to save the other. It died while he stood there. Duffham repeated his conjecture of poison : and Mrs. Reed, all topsy-turvy though she was, three parts bereft of her senses, resented the implication almost angrily.

"Poison !" cried she. "How can you think of such a thing, sir ?"

"I tell you that to the best of my belief these children have both died from some irritant poison," asserted Duffham, coolly imperative. "I ask what you have been giving them."

"They have not been well this three or four days past," replied she, wandering from the point ; not in evasion, but in her mind's bewilderment. "It must have been their teeth, sir ; I thought they were cutting 'em with fever."

"Did you give them any physic ?"

"Yes, sir. A pill a-piece last night when I put 'em to bed."

"Ah !" said Mr. Duffham. "What pill was it ?"

"One of Abel Crew's."

This answer surprised him. Allowing that his suspicion of poison was correct, he assumed that these pills must have contained it : and he had never had cause to suppose that Abel Crew's pills were otherwise than innocent.

Mrs. Reed, her voice broken by sobs, explained further in answer

to his questions, telling him how she had procured these pills from Abel Crew some time before, and had given one of the said pills to each of the babies. Duffham stood against the dresser taking it all in with a solemn face, his cane held up to his chin.

"Let me see this box of pills, Mrs. Reed."

She went upstairs to get it. A tidy woman in her ways, she had put the box in its place again atop of the press. Duffham took off the lid and examined the pills.

"Do you happen to have a bit of sealing-wax in the house, George Reed?" he asked presently.

George Reed, who had stood like a man dazed, looking first on one then on the other of his dead little ones, answered that he had not. But the eldest child, Annie, spoke up, saying that there was a piece in her little work-box: Cathy had given it her last week when she was at home.

It was produced: part of a small stick of fancy wax, green and gold. Duffham wrapped the pill-box up in the back of a letter that he took from his pocket, and sealed it with a seal that hung to his watch-chain. He put the parcel into the hand of George Reed.

"Take care of it," he said. "This will be wanted."

"There could not have be poison in them pills, sir," burst out Mrs. Reed, her distress increasing at the possibility that he might be right. "If there had been they'd ha' poisoned me. One night I took three of 'em."

Duffham did not answer. He was nodding his head to his own thoughts.

"And who ever heard of Abel Crew mixing up poison in his pills?" went on Mrs. Reed. "If you please, sir, I don't think he could do it."

"Well, that part of it puzzles me—how he came to do it," acknowledged Duffham. "I like old Abel, and shall be sorry if it is proved that his pills have done the mischief."

Mrs. Reed shook her head. She had better faith than that in Abel Crew.

Ever so many years before, for it was in the time of Sir Peter Chavasse, there appeared one day a wanderer at Church Dykely. It was hot weather, and he seemed to think nothing of encamping out in the fields by night, under the summer stars. Who he was, or what he was, or why he had come, or why he stayed, nobody knew. He was evidently not a tramp, or a gipsy, or a travelling tinker; quite superior to it all: a slender, young, and silent man, with a pale and gentle face.

At one corner of the common, spreading itself between the village and Chavasse Grange, there stood a covered wooden shed, formerly

used to impound stray cattle ; but left to itself since the square space for the new pound had been railed round. By-and-by it was found that the wanderer had taken to this shed to sleep in. Next his name leaked out : " Abel Crew."

He lived how he could, and as simply as a hermit. Buying a penny loaf at the baker's, and making his dinner of it with a handful of sorrel plucked from the fields, and a drink from the rivulet that ran through the wilderness outside the Chavasse grounds. His days were spent in examining roots and wild herbs, now and then in digging one up ; and his nights mostly in studying the stars. Old Sir Peter struck up a kind of speaking acquaintanceship with him ; and, it was said, was surprised by his stock of knowledge and at the extent of his travels, for he knew personally many foreign places where even Sir Peter himself had never been. That may have caused Sir Peter—who was lord of the manor and of the common included—to tolerate in him what it was supposed he would not in others. Any way, when Abel Crew began to dig the ground about his shed, and plant roots and herbs in it, Sir Peter let him do it and never interfered. It was quite the opposite ; for Sir Peter would sometimes stand to watch him at his work, talking all the while.

In the course of time there was quite an extensive garden round the shed. Speaking comparatively, you know : for we do not expect to see a shed garden as large as that of a mansion. It was fenced in with a hedge and wooden palings, all the work of Abel Crew's hands. Sir Peter was dead then ; but Lady Chavasse, guardian of the young heir, Sir Geoffry, extended to him the same favour that her husband had ; and, if she did not absolutely give sanction to what he was doing, she at any rate did not oppose. Abel Crew filled his garden with rare and choice and useful field herbs, the valuable properties of which he alone understood ; and of ordinary sweet flowers, such as bees love to suck. He set up bee-hives and sold the honey. He distilled lavender and bergamotte for perfumes ; he converted his herbs and roots into medicines, which he supplied to the poor people around ; charging so small a price for them that it could scarcely more than cover the cost of making, and not charging at all in quarters that he knew might find it difficult to pay. At the end of about ten years from his first appearance, he knocked down the old shed, and built up a convenient cottage in its place : doing it all with his own sole pair of hands. And the years went on and on ; and Abel Crew and his cottage, and his herbs, and his flowers, and his bees, and his medicines, were just as much of an institution in the parish as was the Grange itself.

He and I were good friends. I liked him. You know how I take likes and dislikes to faces ; and I rarely saw one that I liked as I liked Abel Crew's. Not for its beauty ; though it really was beautiful, with its perfect shape and delicately carved features ; but for its unmistakable

look of goodness and its innate refinement. Perhaps also for the deep, far-seeing, and often *sad* expression that sat in the earnest eyes. He was old now; sixty, I daresay; slender and very upright still; his white hair brushed back from his forehead and worn rather long. What his original condition of life might have been did not transpire: he never talked of it. More than once I had seen him reading Latin books; and though he fell into the diction of the country people around when talking with them, he could change his tones and language when conversing with his betters. A character, no doubt he was, but a man to be respected. A man of religion, too—attending church regularly twice on a Sunday, wet or dry, and carrying his religion into the little things of every-day life.

His style of dress was old-fashioned and peculiar. So far as I saw, it never varied. A stout coat, waistcoat, and breeches every day, all of one colour—beaver, with leather gaiters buttoned nearly to the knee. On Sundays he wore a suit of black velvet, and a frilled shirt. His breeches were tied at the knee with black ribbon, in which was a plain, shining steel buckle; buckles to match shone in his shoes. His stockings were black, and in the winter he wore black cloth gaiters. In short, on Sundays Abel Crew looked like a fine old-fashioned English gentleman, and would have been taken for one. The woman who did up his linen declared he was more particular over his shirt-frills than Sir Peter himself.

Strangers in the place would sometimes ask what he was. The answer was not easy to give. He was a botanist and herbalist, and made pills, and mixtures, and perfumes, and sold honey, and had built his cottage and planted out his garden, and lived alone, cooking his food and waiting on himself; doing all in fact with his own hands, and was very humble always. On the other side, he had travelled in his youth, he understood paintings, studied the stars, read his store of Latin and classical books, and now and then bought more, and was as good a doctor as Duffham himself. Some people said a better one. Certain it was, that more than once when legitimate medical nostrums had failed—calomel and blisters and bleeding—Abel Crew's simple decoctions and leaves had worked a cure: Look at young Mrs. Sterling at the Court. When that first baby of hers came to town—and a fine squalling young brat he was, with a mouth like a crocodile's!—gatherings arose in her chest or somewhere, one after another, and the agony was awful. Duffham's skill seemed to have gone a blackberrying, the other doctor's also, for neither of the two could do anything for her, and the Court thought she would have died of it. Upon that, some relation of old Sterling's was summoned from London—a great physician in great practice. He came in answer, and was liberal with his advice, telling them to try this and to try the other. But it did no good; and she only got worse. When they were all in despair, seeing

her increased weakness and the prolonged pain, the woman who nursed her spoke of old Abel Crew; she had known him cure in these cases when the doctor could not: and the poor young lady, willing to catch at a straw, told them to go for Abel Crew. Abel Crew took a prepared plaster of herbs with him, green leaves of some kind, and applied it. That night the patient slept more easily than she had for weeks; and in a short time was well.

But, skilful though he seemed to be in the science of herbs, as remedies for sickness and sores, Abel Crew never obtruded himself upon the ailing, or willingly interfered with the province of Duffham; he never would do it unless compelled in the interests of humanity. The patients he chiefly treated were the poor, those who could not have paid Duffham a coin worth thinking of. Duffham knew this. And, instead of being jealous of him, as some medical men might have been, or ridiculing him for a quack, Duffham liked and respected old Abel Crew. He was simple in his habits still: living chiefly upon bread-and-butter, with radishes or mustard-and-cress for a relish, cooking vegetables for his dinner, but rarely meat: and his drink was tea or spring water.

So that Abel Crew was rather a notable character amid us; and when it was known abroad that two of his pills had caused the death of Mrs. Reed's twins, there arose no end of a commotion.

It chanced that the same night this occurred, just about the time in fact that the unfortunate infants were taking down the pills under the superintendence of their mother and the blacksmith's wife, Abel Crew met with an accident; though it was curious enough that it should be so. In taking a pan of boiling herbs off the fire, he let one of the handles slip out of his fingers; it sent the pan down on that side, spilled a lot of the stuff, and scalded his left foot on the instep. Therefore he was about the last person to hear of the calamity; for his door was not open as usual the following morning, and nobody knocked to tell him.

Duffham was the first. Passing by on his morning rounds, the doctor heard the comments of the people, and it arrested him. It was so unusual a thing for Abel Crew not to be about, and for his door to be closed, that some of them had been arriving at a sensible conclusion—Abel Crew, knowing the mischief his pills had done, was shutting himself up within the house, unable to face his neighbours.

"Rubbish!" said Duffham. And he strode up the garden path, knocked at the door with his cane, and entered. Abel had dressed, but was lying down on the bed again to rest his lame foot.

Duffham would have asked to look at it; but he knew Abel Crew was as good at burns and scalds as he was. It had been doctored at once, and was now wrapped up in a handkerchief.

"The fire is nearly out," said Abel, "but it must have rest; by night



it will be quite out, and I shall be able to dress it with my healing salve. I am much obliged to you for coming in, sir: though in truth I don't know how you could have heard of the accident."

"Ah; news flies," said Duffham, evasively, knowing that he had not heard of the foot, or the neighbours either, and had come in for something altogether different. "What is this about the pills?"

"About the pills?" repeated Abel Crew, who had got up out of respect and was putting on his coat. "What pills, sir?"

The doctor told him what had happened. Hester Reed had given one of his pills to each of her babies, and both had died of it. Abel Crew listened quietly; his face and his eyes fixed on Duffham.

"The children cannot have died of the pills," said he, speaking as gently as you please. "Something else must have killed them."

"According to Hester Reed's account, nothing can have done it but the pills. The children had only taken their ordinary food throughout the day, and very little of that. George Reed came running to me in the night, but it was too late: one was gone before I got there. There could be no mistaking the children's symptoms—that they were poisoned."

"This is very strange," exclaimed Abel, looking troubled. "By what kind of poison?"

"Arsenic, I think. I ——"

But here they were interrupted. Dovey the blacksmith, hearing of the calamity, together with the fact that it was his wife who had assisted to administer the suspected doses, deemed it his duty to look into the affair a little, and to resent it. He had left his forge and a bar of iron reeking hot in it, and come tearing along in his leather apron, his shirt sleeves stripped up to the elbow and his arms grimy. A dark-eyed, good-natured little man in general, was Dovey, but exploding with rage at the present moment.

"Now then, Abel Crew, what do you mean by selling pills to poison people?" demanded he, pushing back the door with a bang and stepping in fiercely. Duffham, foreseeing there was going to be a contest, and having no time to waste, took his departure.

"I have not sold pills to poison people," replied Abel.

"Look here," said Dovey, folding his black arms, "be you a-going to eat them pills, or be you not? Come!"

"What do you mean, Dovey?"

"What do I mean! Ain't my meaning plain? Do you own to having sold a box of pills to Hester Reed last winter?—be you a thinking to eat that there fact, and deny of it? Come, Abel Crew?"

"I remember it well," readily spoke up Abel. "Mrs. Reed came here one day, complaining that her head ached continually and her side often had a dull pain in it, and asked me to give her something. I

did; I gave her a box of pills. It was early in January, I think. I know there was ice on the ground."

"Then, you do own to them pills," returned Dovey, more quietly, his fierceness subdued by Abel's civility. "It were you that furnished 'em?"

"I furnished the box of pills I speak of; that Hester Reed had from me in the winter. There's no mistake about that."

"And made 'em too?"

"Yes, and made 'em."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say that there; and now don't you go for to eat your words later, Abel Crew. Our Ann, my wife, helped to give them there two pills to the childern; and I'm not a-going to let her get into trouble over it. You've confessed to the pills, and I be a witness."

"My pills did not kill the children, Dovey," said Abel in a pleasant tone, putting his lame foot up on an opposite chair.

"Not kill 'em?"

"No, that they did not. I've not made pills all these years to poison children at last."

"But what done it if the pills didn't?"

"How can I say? 'Twasn't my pills."

"Dr. Duffham says it was the pills. And he ——"

"Dr. Duffham says it was?"

"Reed telled me that the doctor asked outright, all in a flurry, what his wife had give the babies, and she said she had give 'em nothing but them there two pills of Abel Crew's. Duffham said the pills must have had poison in 'em, and he asked for the box; and Hester Reed she give him the box, and he sealed it up afore their eyes with his own seal."

Abel nodded. He knew that any suspected medicine must in such a case be sealed up.

"And now that I've got that there word from ye, I'll say good-day to ye, neighbour, for I've left my forge to itself, and some iron red-hot in it. And I hope with all my heart and mind,"—the blacksmith turned round from the door to say more kindly, his good-nature cropping up again,—“that it'll turn out it *warn't* the pills, but some'at else: our Ann won't have no cause to be in a fright then."

Which was as much as to say that Ann Dovey was in a fright, don't you see.

That same afternoon, going past the common, I saw Abel Crew in his garden, sitting back against the cottage wall in the sun, his foot resting on a block of wood.

"How did it all happen, Abel?" I asked, running in. "Did you give Mrs. Reed the wrong pills?"

"No, sir," he answered, "I gave her the right pills; the pills I make expressly for such complaints as hers. But if I had, in one sense,

given her the wrong, they could not have brought about any such ill effect as this, for my pills are all innocent of poison."

"I should say it could not have been the pills that did the mischief, after all, then."

"You might swear it as well, Master Johnny, with perfect safety. What killed the poor children, I don't pretend to know, but my pills never did. I tried to get down as far as Reed's to enquire particulars, and found I could not. 'Twas a bit of ill-luck, the disabling myself just at this time."

"Shall you have to appear at the inquest to-morrow?"

He lifted his head quickly at the question—as though it surprised him. Perhaps not having cast his thoughts that way.

"Is there to be an inquest, Master Johnny?"

"I heard so from old Jones. He has gone over to see the coroner?"

"Well, I wish the investigation was all over and done with," said he.

"It makes me uneasy, though I know I am innocent."

Looking at him sitting there in the glistening sun, at his beautiful face with its truthful eyes and its silver hair, it was next to impossible to believe he could be the author of the two children's death. Only—the best of us are liable to mistakes, and sometimes make them. I said as much.

"I made none, Master Johnny," was his answer. "When my pills come to be analysed—as of course they must be—they will be found pure and innocent."

The inquest did not take place till the Friday. Old Jones had fixed it for the Thursday, but the coroner put it off to the next day. And by the time Friday morning dawned, opinion had veered round, and was strongly in favour of Abel Crew. All the parish had been to see him, and his protestations, that he had never in his life put any kind of poison in his medicines, made a great impression. The pills could not have been in fault, said everybody. Dr. Duffham might have sealed them up as a matter of precaution, but the mischief would not be found there.

In the middle of Church Dykely, next door to Perkins the butcher's, stood the Silver Bear inn; a better sort of public-house, kept by Henry Rimmer. It was there that the inquest was held. Henry Rimmer himself and Perkins the butcher were two of the jurymen. Dobbs the blacksmith was another. They all dressed themselves in their Sunday-going clothes to attend it. It was called for two in the afternoon; and soon after that hour, the county coroner (who had dashed up to the Silver Bear in a fast gig, his clerk driving) and the jury trooped down to George Reed's cottage and took a look at the two pale little faces lying there side by side. Then they went back again and the proceedings began.

Of course as many spectators went crowding the room as could cram into it. Three or four chairs were there (besides those occupied by the jury at the table), and a bench stood against the wall. The bench was speedily fought for and filled; but Henry Rimmer's brother, constituting himself master of the ceremonies, reserved the chairs for what he called the "big people," meaning those of account in the place. The Squire was bowed into one; and to my surprise I got another. Why, I could not imagine, unless it was that they remembered I was the owner of George Reed's cottage. But I did not like to sit when so many old persons were standing, and I would not take the chair.

Some little time was occupied with preliminaries before what might be called the thick of the inquest set in. First of all, the coroner went into a passion because Abel Crew had not put in an appearance, asking old Jones if he supposed that was the way justice must be administered in England, and that he ought to have had Crew present. Old Jones, who was in a regular fluster with it all, and his legs more gouty than ever, told the coroner, calling him "his worship," that he had understood Crew meant to be present. Upon which the coroner sharply answered that "understanding" went for nought, and Jones should know his business better.

However, in walked Abel Crew in the midst of the contest. His delayed arrival was caused by his difficulty in getting his damaged foot there; which had been accomplished by the help of a stick and somebody's arm. Abel had dressed himself in his black velvet suit; and as he took off his hat on entering and bowed respectfully to the coroner, I declare he could not be taken for anything but a courtly gentleman of the old school. Nobody offered him a chair. I wished I had not given up mine: he should have had it.

Evidence was first tendered of the death of the children, and of the terrible pain they had died in. Duffham and a medical man, who was a stranger and had helped at the post-mortem, testified to arsenic being the cause of death. The next question was, how had it got administered. A rumour arose in the room that the pills had been analysed; but the result had not transpired. Everybody could see a small parcel standing on the table before the coroner, and knew by its shape that it must be the pill-box.

Hester Reed was called. She said (giving her evidence very quietly, just a sobbing sigh every now and then alone betraying that she felt it) that she was the wife of George Reed. Her two little ones—twins, aged eleven months and a half—had been ailing for a day or two, seemed feverish, would not eat their food, were very cross at times and unnaturally still at others, and she came to the conclusion that their teeth must be plaguing them, and thought she would give them some mild physic. Mrs. Todhetley, the Squire's lady at Dyke Manor, had called

in on the Tuesday afternoon, and agreed with her that some mild physic —

"Confine your statement to what is evidence," interrupted the coroner, in a stern voice.

Hester Reed, looking scared at the check, and perhaps not knowing what was evidence and what not, went on in the best way she could. She and Ann Dovey—who had been neighbourly enough to look in and help her—had given the children a pill apiece in the evening after they were undressed, mashing the pill up in a little sugar and warm water. She then put them to bed upstairs and went to bed herself not long after. In the night she and her husband were awoke by the babies' screams, and they thought it must be convulsions. Her husband lighted the fire and ran for Dr. Duffham; but one had died before the doctor could get there, and the other died close upon it.

"What food had you given them during the day?" asked the coroner.

"Very little indeed, sir. They wouldn't take it."

"What did the little that they did take consist of?"

"It were soaked bread, sir, with milk and some sprinkled sugar. I tried them with some potato mashed up in a spoonful o' broth at midday—we'd had a bit o' biled neck o' mutton for dinner—but they both turned from it."

"Then all they took that day was bread soaked in milk and sweetened with sugar?"

"Yes, it were, sir. But the bread was soaked in warm water and the milk and sugar was put in afterwards. 'Twas but the veriest morsel they'd take, poor little dears!"

"Was the bread—and the milk—and the sugar, the same that the rest of your household used?"

"In course it were, sir. My other children ate plenty of it. *Their* appetites didn't fail 'em."

"Where did you get the warm water from that you say you soaked the bread in?"

"Out o' the tea-kettle, sir. It was the water that I biled for our tea morning and night."

"The deceased children, then, had absolutely no food given to them apart from what you had yourselves?"

"Not a scrap, sir. Not a drop."

"Except the pills."

"Excepting of them in course, sir. None o' the rest of us wanted no physic."

"Where did you procure these pills?"

She went into the history of the pills. Giving the full account of them, as already related.

"By your own showing, witness, it must be four months, or thereabouts, since you had that box of pills from Abel Crew," spoke the

coroner. "How do you know that the two pills you administered to the deceased children came from the same box?"

Hester Reed's eyes opened in a wide stare. She looked as surprised as though she had been asked whether she got the two pills from the moon.

"Yes, yes," interposed one of the jury, "how do you know it was the same box?"

"Why, gentlemen, I had no other box of pills at all but that," she said, when speech came to her. "We've not had no physic but that in the cottage since winter, nor for ever so long afore. I'll swear it were the same box, sirs; there can't be no mistake about it."

"Did you leave it about in the way of people?" resumed the coroner. "So that it might be handled by anybody who might come into your cottage?"

"No, sir," she answered, earnestly. "I never kept the pill-box but in one place, and that was on the top of the high press out of hands' way. I put it there the first night Abel Crew gave it me, and when I wanted to get a pill or two out for my own taking, I'd used to step on a chair—for it's too high for me to reach up without—and help myself. The box have never been took from the place at all, sir, till Tuesday night, when I brought it downstairs with me. When I've wanted to dust the press-top, I've just lifted the pill-box with one hand and passed the duster along under it with the other, as I stood on the chair. It's the same box, sir; I'll swear to that much; and it's the same pills."

Strong testimony. The coroner paused a moment.

"You swear that, you say. You are quite sure?"

"Sir, I am sure and positive. The box was never took from its place since Abel Crew give it me, till I reached up for it on Tuesday evening and carried it down."

"You had been in the habit of taking these pills yourself, you say?"

"I took two three or four times when I first had 'em, sir; but since then I've felt better and not wanted any."

"Did you feel any inconvenience from them? Any pain?"

"Not a bit, sir. As I said to Ann Dovey that night, when she up and asked whether they was fit pills to give the children, they seemed as mild as milk."

"Should you know the box again, witness?"

"Law yes, sir, what should hinder me?" returned Hester Reed, inwardly marvelling at what seemed so superfluous a question.

The coroner undid the paper, and handed the box to her. She was standing close to him, on the other side his clerk—who sat, writing down the evidence. "Is this the box?" he asked. "Look at it well."

Mrs. Reed did as she was bid: turned it about and looked "well."



"Yes, sir, it is the same box," said she. "That is, I am nearly sure of it."

"What do you mean by *nearly* sure?" quickly asked the coroner, catching at the word. "Have you any doubt?"

"Not no moral doubt at all, sir. Only them pill-boxes is all so like one another. Yes, sir, I'm sure it is the same box."

"Open it, and look at the pills. Are they, in your judgment, the same?"

"Just the same, sir," she answered, after taking off the lid. "One might a'most know 'em anywhere. Only——"

"Only what?" demanded the coroner, at her pause.

"Well, sir, I fancied I had rather more left—six or seven, say. There's only five here."

The coroner made no answer to that. He took the box from her and put on the lid. We soon learnt that two had been taken out for the purpose of being analysed.

For who should loom into the room at that juncture but Pettipher, the druggist from Piefinch Cut. He had been analysing the pills in a hasty way in obedience to orders received half an hour ago, and came to tell the result. The pills contained arsenic, he said; not enough to kill a grown person, he thought, but enough to kill a child. As Pettipher was only a small man (in a business point of view) and sold groceries as well as drugs, and spectacles and ear-trumpets, some of us did not think much of his opinion, and fancied the pills should have been analysed by Duffham. That was just like old Jones: giving work to the wrong man.

While Ann Dovey was being called, who would be the next witness, and the coroner had his head bent over his clerk's notes, speaking to him in an undertone, Abel Crew suddenly asked to be allowed to look at the box of pills. The coroner, never lifting his head, just pushed the box downwards on the green cloth; and one of the jury handed it over his shoulder to Abel Crew.

"This is not the box I gave Mrs. Reed," said Abel, in a clear, firm tone, after diving into it with his eyes and nose. "Nor are these the pills."

Up went the coroner's head with a start. He had supposed the request to see the box came from a juryman. It might have been irregular for Abel Crew to be allowed so much; but as it arose partly through the coroner's own fault, he was too wise to make a clatter over it.

"What is that you say?" he asked, stretching out his hand for the box as eagerly as though it had contained gold.

"That this box and these pills are not the same that I furnished to Mrs. Reed, sir," replied Abel, advancing and placing the box in the coroner's hand. "They are not, indeed."

"Not the same pills and box!" exclaimed the coroner. "Why,

man, you have heard the evidence of the witness, Hester Reed, and might see for yourself that she was speaking nothing but truth. Don't talk nonsense here."

"But they are *not* the same, sir," respectfully persisted Abel. "I know my own pills, and I know my own boxes: these are neither the one nor the other."

"Now that won't do; you must take us all for fools," exploded the coroner, who was a man of quick temper. "Just you stand back and be quiet."

"Never a pill-box went out from my hands, sir, but it had my little private mark upon it," persisted Abel. "That box does not bear the mark."

"What is the mark, pray?" asked the coroner.

"Four little dots of ink on the inside of the rim of the lid, sir; and four similar dots on the inside of the box near the edge. They are so faint that a casual observer might not notice them; but they are always there. Of all the pill-boxes now in my house, sir—and I suppose there may be two or three dozen of them—you will not find one but has the mark."

Some whispering had been going on in different parts of the room; but this silenced it. You might have heard a pin drop. The words seemed to make an impression on the coroner: they and Abel Crew were both so earnest.

"You assert also that the pills are not yours," spoke the coroner, who was known to be fond of desultory conversations while holding his inquests. "What proof have you of that?"

"No proof; that is, no proof that I can advance tangible to the eye or ear. But I am certain by the look of them, that those were never my pills."

All this took the jury aback; the coroner also. It had seemed to some of them an odd thing that Hester Reed should have swallowed two or three of the pills at once without their entailing an ache or a pain, and yet that one each had poisoned the babies. Perkins the butcher observed to the coroner that the box must have been changed since Mrs. Reed helped herself from it. Upon which the coroner, after pulling at his whiskers for a moment as if in thought, called out for Mrs. Reed to return.

But when she did so, and was further questioned, she only kept to what she had said before, strenuously denying that the box *could* have been changed. It had never been touched by any hands but her own while it stood in its place atop of the press, and had never been removed from it at all until she took it downstairs on the past Tuesday night.

"Is the room where this press stands your own sleeping-room?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir. It's the other room, where my three children sleep."

"Could these children get to the box?"

"Dear no, sir! 'Twould be quite impossible."

"Had any one an opportunity of handling the box when you took it down stairs on Thursday night?" went on the coroner after a pause.

"Only Mrs. Dovey, sir. Nobody else was there."

"Did she touch it?"

"She laid hold of it to look at the pills."

"Did you leave her *alone* with it?"

"No, sir. Leastways—yes I did for a minute or so, while I went into the back'us to get the sugar and a saucer and spoon."

"Had she the box in her hands when you returned?"

"Yes, sir, I think she had. I think she was still a smelling at the pills. I know the poor little innocents was lying one on one knee, and one on t'other, all flat, and her two hands was lifted with the box in 'em."

"It was after that that you took the pills out of it to give the children?"

"Yes, sir; directly after. But Ann Dovey wouldn't do nothing wrong to the pills, sir."

"That will do," said the coroner in his curt way. "Call Ann Dovey."

Ann Dovey walked forward with a face as red as her new bonnet-strings. She had heard the whole colloquy. Possessing scant veneration for coroners at the best of times, and none for the jury at present assembled, she did not feel disposed to keep down her temper.

The few first questions asked her, however, afforded no opportunity for resentment, for they were put quietly, and tended only to extract confirmation of Mrs. Reed's evidence, as to the fetching the pill-box from above stairs and the administering of the pills. Then the coroner cleared his throat.

"Did you see the last witness, Hester Reed, go into the back kitchen to get a spoon and saucer?"

"I saw her go and fetch 'em from somewhere," replied Ann Dovey, who felt instinctively the ball was beginning, and gave the reins to her tongue accordingly.

"Did you take charge of the pill-box while she was gone?"

"I had it in my hand, if you mean that."

"Did anybody come into the kitchen during that interval?"

"No they didn't," was the tart response.

"You were alone save for the two infants?"

"I were. What of it?"

"Now, witness, did you do anything with that box? Did you, for instance, exchange it for another?"

"I think you ought to be ashamed o' yourselves, all on you, to sit and ask a body such a thing!" exploded Mrs. Dovey. "If I'd knowed

the bother that was to spring up, I'd have chucked the box, pills and all, into the fire first. I wish I had!"

"Was the box, that you gave to Hester Reed on her return, the same box she left with you? Were the pills the same pills?"

"Why, where d'ye think I could have got another box from?" asked she in a shrieking tone. "D'ye suppose I carry boxes and pills about with me? I bain't so fond o' physic as all that comes to."

"Dovey takes pills on occasion for that giddiness he gets; I've seen him take 'em; mayhap ye'd picked up a box of his," spoke Dobbs the blacksmith, mildly.

That was adding fuel to fire. Two of a trade don't agree. Dovey and Dobbs were both blacksmiths: the one in Church Dykely, the other in Piefinch Cut, not much more, so to say, than a stone's throw from one another. The men were good friends enough; but their respective ladies were apt to regard jealously all work taken to the rival establishment. Any other of the jurymen might have made the remark with comparative impunity; not so Dobbs. And, besides the turn the inquiry seemed to be taking, Mrs. Dovey had not been easy about it in her mind from the first; proof of which was furnished by the call, already told of, made by her husband on Abel Crew.

"Dovey takes pills on occasion, do he!" she shrilly retorted. "And what do you take, Bill Dobbs? Pints o' beer when you can get 'em. Who lamed Poole's white horse the t'other day a shoeing of him?"

"Silence!" sternly interrupted the coroner. While Dobbs, conscious of the self-importance imparted to him by the post he was now filling, and of the necessity of maintaining the dignity of demeanour which he was apt to put on with his best clothes, bore the aspersion with equanimity and a stolid face.

"Attend to me, witness, and confine yourself to replying to the questions I put," continued the coroner. "Did you take with you any pills or pill-box of your own when you went to Mrs. Reed's that evening?"

"No I *didn't*," returned Ann Dovey, the emphasis culminating in a sob: and why she should have set on to shiver and shake was more than the jury could understand.

"Do you wear pockets?"

"What if I do?" she said. But her lips took a white shade, and I thought she was trying to brave it out.

"Had you a pocket on that evening?"

"Heaven be good to me!" I heard her mutter under her breath. And if ever I saw a woman look frightened nearly to death, Ann Dovey looked it then.

"Had you a pocket on that evening, witness?" repeated the coroner sharply.

"A—es."

"What articles were in it? Do you recollect? Come!"

"It were a key or two," came the answer at length, her very teeth chattering and all the impudence suddenly gone out of her. "And my thimble, sir;—and some coppers;—and a part of a nutmeg;—and— and I don't remember nothing else, sir."

"No box of pills? You are sure you had not that?"

"Haven't I said so, sir?" she rejoined, bursting into a frantic flood of tears. For which, and for the sudden agitation, nobody could see any reason: and perhaps it was only that which made the coroner harp upon the same string. Her demeanour had become suspicious.

"You had no poison of any kind in your pocket, then?"

But he asked the question in jest more than earnest. For when she went into hysterics, instead of replying, he let her go. He was used to see witnesses scared at being brought before him.

Well, to make short of the affair now, for there is not room to get it all in here, though I had thought there would be, the verdict was not arrived at that day. When other witnesses had been examined, the coroner addressed the jury. Ten of them listened deferentially, and were quite prepared to return a verdict of Manslaughter against Abel Crew: seemed red-hot to do it, in fact. But two of them dissented. They were not satisfied, they said; and they held out for adjourning the inquest to see if any more light could be thrown upon the affair. As they evidently had the sense of the room with them, the coroner yielded and adjourned the inquest in a temper.

And then it was discovered that the name was not Crew but Carew. Abel himself corrected the coroner. Upon that, the coroner sharply demanded why it was that he had lived under a false name.

"Nay sir," replied Abel, as dignified as you please, "I have not had any intention of doing so. When I first came to this neighbourhood I gave my name correctly—Carew: but the people at once converted it into Crew by their mode of pronunciation."

"At any rate, you must have sanctioned it."

"Tacitly I have. What did it signify? When I have had occasion to write my name—but that has been very rare—I have written it Carew. Old Sir Peter Chavasse knew it was Carew, and used to call me so; but that's many a year gone by. Indeed, sir, I have had no reason to conceal my name."

"That's enough," said the coroner, cutting him short. "Stand back Abel Carew. The proceedings are adjourned to this day week."

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

*(To be concluded next month.)*

## MAGGIE'S BOUQUET.

SOME people called it a church festival. It was in fact only a bazaar, held in the school-house; the proceeds obtained from it were to augment the fund being got up to purchase a new organ. Subscriptions for church purposes don't flow in in villages as they do in large and populous towns. Our little church at Mendon sadly needed the organ, and we heartily hoped to be able to obtain it.

But the sale of the wares flagged. All the gentry had been in; the end of the day was approaching, and the stalls had not parted with half their goods. When the devices and persuasions of the fair saleswomen seemed to be exhausted, somebody proposed that a magnificent bouquet possessed by one of these should be offered for sale: its purchaser to bestow it upon the prettiest young lady present, a committee of gentlemen to decide upon the successful candidate. The two acknowledged beauties of Mendon (each of whom presided at a stall, and hated each other like poison) lifted their heads complaisantly at the proposal, for each felt assured in her own heart that she herself alone should win it. And this fact might be unmistakably read in both their faces.

A young girl stood watching them with evident appreciation and amusement; and then a mischievous smile played about her lips and increased the merry lustre of her eyes. It was Margaret Wilson. She was not beautiful at all; quite plain when beside those other two beauties; but she had a lively, pleasant, happy face, and a bright fresh healthy complexion. Everybody liked Maggie Wilson. Laughing, she ran up to Mrs. Neale, the present owner of the bouquet.

"May I take it round first, Mrs. Neale?"

"What—you, Maggie? What for?"

"To get votes."

"Well, take it, Maggie, and get all you can," said the lady, laughing. "You have a right, I suppose—and you have asked first."

The words, good-naturedly spoken, evidently told the room, as well as Maggie herself, that, *she* had no chance, though she did try. Maggie took the flowers, and spoke as she passed the two young-lady beauties.

"I am sure you both think nobody has a chance but yourselves," she said in a half-joking and very pleasant voice; "but I mean to gain this prize."

"Indeed!" answered one of them. "It will be news to the world—Maggie Wilson's getting a prize for beauty."

Maggie nodded. "I intend to have these flowers," she said, a pretty show of emphasis on the words. "I shall ask everyone of the gentlemen to vote for me."



"If I could not gain them without begging, I would rather not gain them at all," said Ada Cross. "It will be looked upon as a very bold venture."

"Not at all," said Maggie. "It is only a bit of fun. Good-bye! I am going to begin my canvass."

"You will not dare to do it, Maggie Wilson!"

"Will I not! Just watch and see."

She went dancing up to a good-natured looking man standing near—the village lawyer; smiles dimpling her face.

"Mr. Rigg, will you not vote for me?"

"Certainly I will," he answered, laughing pleasantly; "with all my heart, Miss Margaret. I'd give ten votes if I had them to a bonnie lass like you."

"Thank you!" cried Maggie, in glee. "That's vote the first," she added, looking back at the beauties. "Oh, I shall gain it."

Away she went, on her personal canvass. The gentlemen entered heartily into the spirit of the thing, and promised her right and left. They all knew Maggie and all liked her. Her smiles increased, her cheeks and her eyes grew brighter; but with all the "soliciting" she was a gentle, modest-mannered maiden still.

"Miss Wilson," whispered a lady in her ear, "a stranger is standing yonder: there, over by the door: go and ask for his vote."

"Oh, I scarcely like to do that. He does not know me."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I am not afraid; I will go," said Maggie, with sudden resolution.

"But he does look very serious and dignified. I don't care; I'll do it."

She approached the stranger referred to: a fine, gentlemanly-looking man of some thirty years. With glowing cheeks and a deprecating smile, she explained her errand, and asked him to subscribe the shilling to the bouquet, and to give her his vote.

"Certainly," he replied, "I shall be most happy. May I purchase as many votes as I please?"

"Yes. But I only asked for one."

"Then you shall have that one with nineteen added to it," he returned; evidently pleased with the bright face before him.

"Oh, thank you; thank you! I think I may be sure of the bouquet now."

"Are you so very fond of flowers?"

"Yes, I am. But—I began this just in a bit of fun; because others thought *they* were sure of it, and that I had no chance," she ingeniously confessed. "Of course, I should have had no chance if it went by merit. That is, by looks."

"Of course not," acquiesced the stranger. But his tone did not sound like a real one.

Maggie won the prize. And for the time being was made much of;

all the young men present gathered about her, neglecting the other stall-keepers, and declaring that she deserved the prize for her merry, winning ways, if not for regular beauty. So the bazaar came to an end and the funds were counted up; and still there was not enough for the organ.

Some days afterwards Maggie received the gift of another lovely bouquet, left at her mother's house for her in rather a mysterious manner. A thought crossed her at once that it must come from that handsome stranger. None of the Mendon gentlemen would be likely to trouble themselves further about her: they had all gone back to the dull routine of daily life, to desks and books, with which flowers have nothing to do. The stranger's name had proved to be Stanhope: he was staying at the inn, and was discovered to be a man of fortune.

Everybody had made his personal acquaintance, including Maggie. He was civil—nay, courteous—to all; but he evidently liked Maggie best. At least, he called twice on Mrs. Wilson to once elsewhere; and Maggie kept receiving anonymous bouquets every other day. The village tacitly rose up in arms. The two young-lady beauties could not hide their indignation.

"That little scrub of a Maggie Wilson to monopolize people indeed!" said Ada Cross. "I shall teach her better."

"How will you do that?"

"I *will* do it. Never you mind how."

The two beauties were together, exploding off a little of their indignation one to the other. In a case like this it behoved them to make common cause. Of the two, Ada Cross was the more resolute and indignant, for she had the stronger will.

Within a few days of this, an envelope addressed to Mr. Stanhope was left by the morning postman at the Brown Bear inn. Upon opening it, he read some sentimental, gushing, foolish lines of poetry, breathing the most ardent love for himself: in fact, intimating that an offer of marriage from him would be agreeable; and it was signed "Margaret Wilson."

Mr. Stanhope, who had been standing at his sitting-room window, waiting for breakfast, when the landlord handed him the letter, looked straight over the opposite houses to the hills beyond, after reading it, as if in a study of consideration, and then read it carefully again. A contemptuous smile curled his lips, and he tore the note to pieces with mocking fingers.

"*She* never wrote that," he cried emphatically. "What a shame it is! It emanates from some enemy of hers: perhaps, from one or other of those two ill-natured girls!"

That same evening there was a gathering at the house of Mrs. Lomax: a quiet carpet dance. While Maggie was dressing for it, another of those mysterious bouquets was left at her door.

"Who *can* they be from?" cried Mrs. Wilson. "Maggie, I do not like this. It is getting beyond a joke."

Maggie blushed. But she held her tongue as to any suspicion she might privately entertain.

She entered Mrs. Lomax's rooms by her mother's side, simply attired in white muslin and blue ribbons, nothing fine or fashionable about her except the bouquet. *That* was of rare beauty, and she carried it in her hand. The rooms were brilliantly lighted; and presently she saw Mr. Stanhope approaching her through their blaze. In her modest, pretty blushing way, she thanked him for the flowers she held.

"Why do you thank *me*?" he asked, a curious look of laughing mischief in his eyes.

"Because—I—I think they can only have come from you," she answered. "These, and the others that I have received have been left at the house by the florist's young son, Tom; but Tom protests he does not know who it is that gives the orders to his father."

"But why pitch upon me?" repeated Mr. Stanhope.

"There is no one else in Mendon to pitch upon," said Maggie, simply. "Not a gentleman in the whole place would think of sending bouquets to me."

"Uncertain premises," laughed Mr. Stanhope. "You cannot know that. They united in giving you one at the bazaar, you know."

"Yes, I know. But that was only a bit of pleasantry."

"Was it?"

"Well, I cannot be sure, of course," returned Maggie. "If you did send me these—and the others—I thank you very very much for thinking of me, Mr. Stanhope, for I do love flowers; but you must please not to send me any more."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because mamma is getting just a little vexed. She thinks it is growing rather beyond a joke. These choice flowers must be so expensive, she says."

Glancing quickly round as Maggie left him, Mr. Stanhope caught the eyes of the two beauties, furtively looking at him and Maggie, and whispering together. They were evidently taken to, and moved off in separate directions.

"I see," said Mr. Stanhope to himself. "Those looks are too conscious, young ladies."

Sauntering across the room, he joined Miss Cross, and entered into conversation with her, putting his name down on her card for a quadrille as a commencement. The musician was striking chords on the piano, but the dancing had not yet begun.

"By the way, do you ever write poetry, Miss Cross?" he suddenly asked, gazing into her eyes.

A sudden flush; a strange, startled look on her face, and then a

deadly whiteness. Putting that aside, Miss Cross retained calmness of manner.

"Poetry! oh dear no. I could not write a line if I tried."

"Perhaps your friend writes it better than you do?"

"I am sure she does not. Were you thinking of asking either of us to write some? What an idea!" she added with a loud, affected laugh.

"No, I was not thinking of that. There's the signal to take our places: I must go and find my partner. Do not forget, Miss Cross, that the next is my dance."

He went off to find Maggie, and requested the honour of her hand for the first quadrille; and subsequently he might have been seen whirling her in a waltz. Ada Cross was taken by him next; and then he went back to Maggie again. In short, it seemed to be Maggie, and only Maggie, all the evening. The room noticed it. People made comments freely.

"Maggie," said he, calling her so for the first time as Mrs. Wilson was preparing to depart, "do you know what the gossips are busily saying about you and me?"

"I—yes—I heard something just now," she answered with hesitation, but in her strict truth.

"Well, what had we better do about it?"

Maggie's fingers were trembling so much that she could not fasten her cloak. Mrs. Wilson was looking round.

"Please let me go, Mr. Stanhope. Mamma is wondering what can keep me."

"I will let you go in a minute," whispered he. "Maggie, my darling, there is only one obvious course open to us to satisfy the chattering. You must give me a right to answer for us both."

"I have no good looks,—and no money," pleaded Maggie. "You cannot *mean* it—that you want *me*."

"Not want you! You silly child! What else has kept me at that blessed hostelry, the old Brown Bear, but you, do you suppose. May I call on your mother to-morrow morning, Maggie?"

Maggie gave no answer in words. But her hand insensibly lingered in Mr. Stanhope's. Sufficient permission.

And very soon Mendon lost Maggie Wilson. For Mr. Stanhope took her away with him to his own home.

## THE SENSATION NOVEL.

IT is scarcely necessary to remark that the Sensation Novel is extremely popular at the present day. I have therefore chosen it for the heading of this paper, because to a certain extent it may be taken as a type of the times. We have, indeed, besides plenty of other kinds of fiction, tales of fashionable life, philosophical novels, and novels with a *purpose*, political or artistic :—but all these fall far short of the general popularity enjoyed by the real wholesale, thoroughgoing, Sensation Story. And yet we are told that we live in dull times—that the days of romance, like the golden age, or the days of chivalry, are past away, never to return. But surely this cannot be true of the age which has witnessed such scenes as the Commune in Paris, or the French and German war. Because soldiers do not now go to battle clad in armour, with sword and battle-axe, singing the praises of their own mighty deeds like Tennyson's heroes in the Idyls of the King, we are apt to consider that it is all a mere matter of business—that the new inventions in fire-arms leave no room for individual daring—and that war now, instead of being a fit theme to awaken the fire of the poet, or kindle the genius of the minstrel, is a matter more deserving the attention of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the members of the Peace Society.

Those were the days of romance, say some, when every road had its band of highwaymen—when Dick Turpin was causing more excitement by his daring deeds between London and York than could be got up by all the rest of the world put together. Or, to look back a few years before this to the time when coaches had no outside places at all ; when the starting of a vehicle called the *Flying Coach*, and which undertook to do the whole journey between London and Oxford in one day, was looked upon as a perfect wonder. Macaulay has described the startling experiment. The Vice-Chancellor, by notice affixed to all public places, prescribed the hour and place of departure. At six in the morning the carriage began to move from before the ancient front of All Souls' College, and at seven in the evening the adventurous gentlemen, who had been the first to run the risk, were safely deposited at their inn in London. Yes, those were the days for adventures ; when the traveller who wished to move expeditiously and was not encumbered with much baggage, performed a long journey on horseback ; when the mounted highwayman, a character now only known to us from books, was a living fact, who haunted all the waste tracks which lay on the great routes near London ; when the Cambridge scholars trembled as they approached Epping Forest, even in broad daylight.

We never now hear of such adventures as happened when Charles

the Second was king. How Claude Duval, the French page of the Duke of Richmond, took to the road, became captain of a formidable gang, and had the honour to be named first in a royal proclamation against notorious offenders; how, at the head of his troop, he stopped a lady's coach, in which there was a booty of four hundred pounds; how he took only one hundred, and suffered the fair owner to ransom the rest by dancing a coranto with him on the heath; how his vivacious gallantry stole away the hearts of all women; how his dexterity at sword and pistol made him the terror of men; how at length, in the year 1670, he was seized when overcome by wine; how dames of high rank visited him in prison, and with tears interceded for his life; how the king would have granted a pardon, but for the interference of Judge Morton, the terror of highwaymen, who threatened to resign his office unless the law was carried into full effect; and how, after execution, the corpse lay in state, with all the pomp of escutcheons, waxlights, black hangings, and mutes, till the same cruel judge who had intercepted the mercy of the crown sent officers to disturb the obsequies. No, it is quite true that we have nothing now quite equal to this picture, as drawn by Lord Macaulay; yet still there is quite as much sentiment, quite as much romance in England now as two hundred years ago. True, nobody now, not even the most dreamy young lady, would like to look forward to a life of honeysuckles and clematis in company with Damon and a crook. Yet the novels of the day prove that there is no diminution of the romantic force of the English nation. Heroes of the Claude Duval school are still in favour. We still meet with Paul Cliffords, and the eagerness with which an interesting *mauvais sujet* is run after to-day, proves that human nature is still the same, and likely so to continue.

The feminine influence that pervades it is a strongly characteristic feature of the literature of the time. Women are of much account in it, and women produce a large share of it. The great bales of fiction which are constantly manufactured owe their chief proportions and bulk to female talent and diligence; and, bearing in mind that this sort of reading forms a very considerable part of the amusement of young people at present, the amount of harm done by it is by no means insignificant.

In alluding, however, to modern female novelists, we should carefully distinguish between the ladies whose works are a pleasure to read and those who seem to take a delight in outraging morals and probability. It is generally when female novelists undertake to draw characters of the opposite sex that they most frequently fall into absurdity. The Guy Livingstone stamp of humanity is not the most pleasing even when well painted, but it becomes utterly unbearable when it is burlesqued. And yet, with the same ease with which a fashion is changed, and a coal-scuttle bonnet becomes by substitution



a wisp of dead hair and a beetle, a new vista is opened: and, withdrawing from pictures of their own sex, the ladies began to present us with studies of ours. Taking up the Rev. Charles Kingsley's doctrine of muscles, and finding in the pages of some male writer the supposed correct style of conversation, mostly made up of slang and twaddle, the novel-reading public all at once became overrun with an army of monsters, quite unlike, it is to be hoped, to any creatures in heaven or earth. There are novels now in circulation that will certainly puzzle the future student of the Victorian era. Thackeray used to say an English author dare not now describe a man in the fashion that Fielding described Tom Jones, or Smollett drew Count Fathom.

Of late the ladies have been having it all their own way in the realms of fiction. There was a time when the chief characters in fiction were men, and when to find a female portrait was a rare exception. There was a time when such characters as we now commonly encounter would be looked upon as the wildest dreams of a distempered imagination. How colourless, for instance, are some of Sir Walter Scott's heroines, when compared with the men in whom he delights. Now-a-days all the more important characters seem to be women. Our novelists have suddenly discovered an unworked mine of wealth, and they give us jewels of women in many a casket. This is not to be wondered at when the writer herself belongs to the fair sex, but strange to say their masculine rivals follow in the same track. Nor do we find this tendency evident only in prose fiction. Look at Mr. Tennyson: a great poet is supposed to be the most perfect representative of his age; and the greater the poet, the more attention people pay to his opinions. Now the greater part of the Laureate's poetry may be described as a dream of fair women. For one man, he paints half a dozen women; and we remember the women better than the men. We remember the Princess and all her trials; we remember Dora, Lilian, Enid, Elaine, Vivien, Guinevere, and the Gardener's Daughter, and many more. How many men of the Laureate's drawing can we set against so splendid an array of feminine excellence?

But though the ladies have flourished and still are flourishing so successfully in this branch of literature, still we must venture to remind them that although they very nearly, yet they did not quite, found the school of the Sensation Novel. I think we must grant this honour to Horace Walpole, for this species of composition cannot be traced higher than the "Castle of Otranto." The following curious account of the origin and composition of this romance is given by the author himself, in a letter dated March 9th, 1769. "Shall I confess to you," he writes, "what was the origin of this romance? I waked one morning in the beginning of last June, from a dream, of which all I could recover was that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head like mine, filled with gothic story), and that on

the uppermost bannister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew in my hands, and I grew fond of it. In short I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drank tea, about six o'clock, till half-an-hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence. You may laugh at my earnestness, but if I have amused you by retracing, with any fidelity, the manners of ancient days, I am content."

This, I fear, is rather a long quotation, but it is interesting as the description of the birth, as it were, of the grandfather of "sensation." In the "Castle of Otranto" we find quite a surfeit of all the elements of a sensation novel. Have we not skulls and skeletons, sliding panels, damp vaults, trap doors, and dismal rooms? Is there not a sword which requires a hundred men to lift it; a hero imprisoned in a helmet; to say nothing of groans: gothic windows through which no light can pierce (rather a common failing in gothic windows now) and passages leading no-where, *ad lib.*? Certainly, if the hearers are not all ears, at any rate the writer is all tale. Without any doubt the "Castle of Otranto" is the first sensation novel, and it was written by a man.

But next to him comes a woman, and the lady's name is Mrs. Radcliffe: and to her I must devote a few words. Nor is there any occasion to say anything about the writers of the day, since everyone is familiar with their works, with all their merits and defects. Like all other of her school, the first object which Mrs. Radcliffe sets before her to accomplish in her works is to raise powerful emotions of surprise, awe, and especially terror, by means and agents apparently supernatural. To effect this laudable end, which was pretty much the same as that aimed at by the ancient tragedians to stir up the passions of their hearers, she places her characters and transports her readers amid scenes which are calculated strongly to excite the mind, and predispose it for spectral illusions. She prepares her readers for the nightmare which is to follow, by taking them through a series of gothic castles, gothic abbeys, and subterranean passages, where banditti flourish and winds howl, just as one might prepare one's body for a sensation dream by taking a good supper of lobsters and champagne shortly before going to bed. That which separates the works of Mrs. Radcliffe chiefly from those by which they were preceded is, that in the "Castle of Otranto" and the "Old English Baron" the machinery is in fact supernatural; whereas the means and agents employed by Mrs. Radcliffe in the "Romance of the Forest," and the "Mysteries of Udolpho," and others, are in reality human, and such as can be, or at least are professed to be, explained by natural events. Many of my readers can doubtless recollect the feelings of disappointment which they felt on finding the mysterious object which

has been carefully concealed behind a curtain throughout three volumes of the "*Mysteries of Udolpho*," turn out at the end of the fourth to be only a wax figure. Another characteristic of the style of this very talented woman is the great freedom with which she indulged in landscape painting. She has even gone so far in one of her books as to make the sun set twice the same evening. One is sometimes inclined to lament that she did not follow the example of Mr. Puff in the play: "I open with a clock striking to beget an awful attention in the audience—it is also a mark of the time, which is four o'clock in the morning, and it saves a description of the rising sun, and a great deal about gilding the eastern hemisphere." Yet though we may smile at these little oversights, still some of Mrs. Radcliffe's landscapes are eminently beautiful, reminding us as specimens of word painting of Mr. Ruskin, and our wonder is increased when we reflect, that though most of her scenes are laid in Italy or Sicily, she herself had never moved out of the narrow circle of an English ordinary humdrum life. She has also been honoured by Lord Byron—no mean judge on such a matter—by having her name immortalised in a line of "*Childe Harold*." Miss Austin, in one of her charming tales, has smiled good-naturedly at her sister novelist's love of the marvellous. She makes her heroine, on paying a visit to Northanger Abbey, expect to find all manner of wonders in the old house. Her attention is drawn to an old piece of furniture in her bedroom, and on looking into it she discovers in one of the drawers a bundle of papers, which she hopes to contain the revelation of some unfortunate prisoner; but alas! it only proves to be a collection of old washing bills.

As we are now in the very midst of sensation, it will not be going far out of the way to relate a sensation fact. Some time ago I met with the following startling story, which was told by the Archbishop of Bordeaux to the French Senate a few years since. A young priest was struck with a cataleptic fit in a crowded church on a holiday in the year 1826. He fell down apparently quite dead, with the words of prayer upon his lips. They carried him out, and after some hours began to make preparations for his interment. He could not see; but all the time he could hear; and the nature of what he heard was by no means agreeable. The doctor duly declared that he was dead: and, after various inquiries as to his age, birthplace, and other particulars, gave orders that the funeral should take place on the next day. The venerable bishop of the church where the young priest was in the habit of officiating came, and, standing at the foot of the couch on which lay the body, recited the "*De profundis*;" they next measured him for his shroud, and then, as night advanced, they left him in a state of inexpressible agony such as a living being in such a situation may perhaps imagine. At last there sounded a voice in his ear with whose loved accents he was familiar as a friend of his youth. The sound of

that voice was miraculous, and urged him to make a superhuman effort. The young priest appeared next day in the choir, restored again to life as it were out of the very jaws of death.

It cannot be denied, I think, after what has been said, that the present is an age of sensation. It is at the same time an age of reading desks and writing desks: this implies that it is also an age of thought. But of late years critics have been so impressed with the craving which exists among us for sensation, that they cannot bring themselves to believe in the thoughtfulness of a people demanding fresh excitement. But it is shallow to pick out the frivolities of the day as its regnant characteristics. Perhaps it may be the very thoughtfulness of the age which leads people to seek relaxation in what appears light and almost childish amusements. Thus, when even many of our novelists indulge us with reflections, theories, schemes for universal improvement, and a good deal more which might generally be left out with advantage, is it to be wondered at that we are in our moments of leisure compelled to seek refuge from thought in sensation, and so pass from one extreme to another?

There is a writer, before concluding, whose name must not be left altogether without mention even in a sketch as brief as the present. In Miss Brontë's "*Jane Eyre*" a chord was struck which has vibrated very widely ever since the publication of that remarkable work. There are scenes in it often of the most startling and absorbing interest. Nothing can appeal more strongly to the imagination of the reader than the description of the mad wife of Rochester; the secret of the barred rooms; his almost marriage with Jane, which would have been bigamy; the fire, and that tremendous scene where the maniac is beheld with her long black hair streaming against the flames as she stood; where the husband ascends through the skylight in the roof, calling "*Bertha*." He approaches her; and then she yelled and gave a spring, and the next minute she lay smashed on the pavement. Though Rochester himself is not a pleasing character, still there is nothing in his conduct, even when most harsh and disagreeable, at all resembling the fierce and brutal bearing of some popular heroes of the present day. In the trials to which he is exposed from the terrible mad woman who is bound to him in the relation of wife, we may fairly draw some excuse for his restless and occasionally savage manner, and at his worst he never transgresses the boundary which separates the gentleman from the snob. It is indeed wonderful how a girl brought up in a remote country parsonage, seeing little of any sort of society, and having in consequence so few opportunities of observing character, should have succeeded in drawing a hero at once so complex in his nature and yet so true to life. Nor has she repeated herself in either of her subsequent works. "*Shirley*" and "*Villette*" belong to quite a different class of fiction from "*Jane Eyre*." Though both are

excellent in their way, they do not rise to the same level of dramatic power which stamps the first effort of her genius.

What gives success to the novelist to-day is the same as brings audiences to the theatre—sensation. Of this we find traces everywhere, and often it is productive of much harm. There is more sympathy in the less exalted muse than in her graver sister. Comedy comes nearer home than Tragedy. No man expects to meet with Lears or Othellos in ordinary life, but at the corner of the next street he may find himself the hero of a situation such as comedy might prize. And so most of us prefer the mirthful actor, whether we read his doings in the pages of a novel, or smile at them from the stalls of a theatre. And so long as the mirth is harmless, perhaps this is the best. *Dulce est desipere in loco*. Nor do I think that I can conclude this paper better than by quoting a passage from a letter by G. P. R. James, a writer now perhaps too little remembered, in which he discloses his literary aims:—"My object has been to show," he says, "that fiction, without being dry and tedious, may be rendered serviceable to every noble principle; may be taught to convey every generous lesson; and, by interesting our good feelings, instead of our bad feelings, gain over imagination to the side of virtue, and, without crushing our passions, direct them aright."

E. B.



#### SONNET.

My love lies silent 'neath the darksome yew,  
 And I live on with beating heart and brain,  
 And feel my life may not be all in vain  
 Though he has bid me his last fond adieu.  
 I neither shall forget nor love again;  
 But time will draw away the spirit's pain,  
 As noon-tide glare dries up the morning dew,  
 When dawn's red tints melt in the zenith's blue.  
 The morn doth not return, nor doth the glow  
 Of early passion; but the hours pass by  
 In storm, it may be, or serenity:  
 And so my day of life must onward flow,  
 Till the eve come, and the dew fall once more,  
 And a new glory flood the western shore.

EMMA RHODES.

## THE DIAMOND BRACELET.

*By the Author of "EAST LYNNE."*

## I.

THE stately rooms of one of the finest houses in London were open for the reception of evening guests. Wax lights, looking innumerable when reflected from the mirrors, shed their rays on the gilded decorations, on the fine paintings, and on the gorgeous dresses of the ladies; the enlivening strains of the band invited to the dance, and the rare exotics emitted a sweet perfume. It was the west-end residence of a famed and wealthy city merchant of lofty standing; his young wife was an earl's daughter, and the admission to the house of Mr. and Lady Adela Netherleigh was coveted by the gay world.

"There's a rent!" almost screamed a pretty-looking girl. By some mishap during dancing, her partner contrived to put his foot upon her thin white dress, and the bottom of the skirt was torn half off.

"Quite impossible that I can finish the quadrille," quoth she to him half in amusement, half provoked at the misfortune. "You must find another partner while I go and get this repaired."

It was Lady Frances Chenevix. By some neglect, the lady's-maid was not in attendance up-stairs; and Frances, in her impatience, ran down to the housekeeper's parlour. The sister of Lady Adela, she was quite at home in the house. She had gathered the damaged dress up on her arm, but her white silk petticoat fell in rich folds around her.

"Just look what an object that stupid ——" And there stopped the young lady. For, instead of the housekeeper and lady's-maid, whom she expected to meet, nobody was in the room but a gentleman; a tall, handsome man. She looked thunderstruck: and then slowly advanced and stared at him, as if not believing her own eyes.

"My goodness, Gerard! Well, I should just as soon have expected to meet the dead here."

"How are you, Lady Frances?" he said, holding out his hand with hesitation.

"Lady Frances! I am much obliged to you for your formality. Lady Frances returns her thanks to Mr. Hope for his polite inquiries," continued she, in a tone of pique, and honouring him with a swimming curtsy of ceremony.

He caught her hand. "Forgive me, Fanny, but our positions have altered. At least, mine has; and how did I know that you were not altered with it?"

"You are an ungrateful——raven," cried she, "to croak like that. After getting me to write you no end of letters, with all the news about everybody, and beginning 'My dear Gerard,' and ending 'Your affec-



tionate Fanny,' and being as good to you as a sister, you meet me with My Lady Frances !' Now don't squeeze my hand to atoms. What on earth have you come to England for?"

"I could not stop there," he returned, with emotion; "I was fretting away my heartstrings. So I formed a resolution, and I came back. Guess in what way, Frances; and what to do."

"How should I know? To call me 'Lady Frances,' perhaps."

"As a clerk; a clerk, to earn my bread. That's what I am now. Very consistent, is it not, for one in my position to address familiarly Lady Frances Chenevix?"

"You never spoke a grain of sense in your life, Gerard," she exclaimed peevishly. "What do you mean?"

"Mr. Netherleigh has taken me into his counting-house."

"Mr. Netherleigh!" she echoed, in surprise. "What, with that—that —"

"That crime hanging over me. Speak up, Frances."

"No; I was going to say that doubt. I don't believe you guilty: you know that, Gerard."

"I am in his house of business, Frances; and I came up here to-night from the city to bring a note to him from his partner. The reception-rooms were occupied, I suppose, and the servants put me in here. So much the better. I do not care to meet old acquaintances."

"But you had a mountain of debts in England, Gerard, and were afraid of arrest."

"I have managed that: they are going to let me square up by instalments. Has the bracelet never been heard of?"

"Oh! that's gone for good. No doubt melted down in a caldron, as the colonel calls it, and the diamonds reset. It remains a mystery of the past, and is never expected to be solved."

"And they still suspect me! What is the matter with your dress?"

"Matter enough," answered she, letting it down, and turning round for his inspection. "I came here to get it repaired. My great booby of a partner did it for me."

"Fanny, how is Alice Seaton?"

"You have cause to ask after her. She is dying."

"Dying!" repeated Mr. Hope, in a hushed, shocked tone.

"I do not mean actually dying this night, or going to die to-morrow; but that she is dying by slow degrees, there is no doubt. It may be weeks off yet: I cannot tell."

"Where is she?"

"Curious to say, she is where you left her—at Lady Sarah Hope's. Alice could not bear the house after the loss of the bracelet, for she was so obstinate and foolish as to persist that the servants must suspect her, even if Lady Sarah did not. She left; and this spring Lady Sarah saw her, and was so shocked at the change in her, the extent to which she

had wasted away, that she brought her to town by main force, and we and the doctors are trying to nurse her up. It seems of no use."

"Are you also staying at Colonel Hope's again?"

"I invited myself there a week or two ago, to be with Alice. It is pleasanter, too, than being at home."

"I suppose the Hopes are here to-night?"

"My sister is. I do not think your uncle has come yet."

"Does he ever speak of me less resentfully?"

"Not he. I think his storming over it has only made his suspicions stronger. Not a week passes but he begins again about that detestable bracelet. He is unalterably persuaded that you took it, and nobody must dare to put in a word in your defence."

"And does your sister honour me with the same belief?" demanded Mr. Hope, bitterly.

"Lady Sarah is silent on the point to me: I think she scarcely knows what to believe. You see I tell you all freely, Gerard."

Before another word could be spoken, Mr. Netherleigh entered. An aristocratic looking man, with a noble countenance. He bore a sealed note for Mr. Hope to deliver in the city.

"Why, Fanny!" he exclaimed to his sister-in-law, "you here!"

"Yes: look at the sight they have made me," replied she, shaking down her dress for his benefit, as she had previously done for Mr. Hope's. "I am waiting for some of the damsels to mend it for me: I suppose Mr. Hope's presence has scared them away. Won't mamma be in a fit of rage when she sees it, for it is new on to-night."

Gerard Hope shook hands with Lady Frances; and Mr. Netherleigh, who had a word of direction to give him, walked with him into the Hall. As they stood there, who should enter but Colonel Hope, Gerard's uncle. He started back when he saw Gerard.

"C—ca—can I believe my senses?" stuttered he. "Mr. Netherleigh, is *he* one of your guests?"

"He is here on business," was the merchant's reply. "Pass on, colonel."

"No, sir, I will not pass on," cried the enraged colonel, who had not rightly caught the word business. "Or if I do pass on, it will only be to warn your guests to take care of their jewellery. So, sir," he added turning on his nephew, "you can come back, can you, when the proceeds of your theft are spent! You have been starring it in Calais, I hear. How long did the bracelet last you to live upon?"

"Sir," answered Gerard, with a pale face, "it has been starving, rather than starring. I asserted my innocence at the time, Colonel Hope, and I repeat it now."

"Innocence!" ironically repeated the colonel, turning to all sides of the hall, as if he took delight in parading the details of the unfortunate past. "The trinkets were spread out on a table in Lady Sarah's own

house : you came stealthily into it—after having been forbidden it for another fault—went stealthily into the room, and the next minute the diamond bracelet was missing. It was owing to my confounded folly in listening to a parcel of women, that I did not bring you to trial at the time : I have only once regretted not doing it, and that has been ever since. A little wholesome correction at the Penitentiary might have made an honest man of you. Good-night, Mr. Netherleigh : if you encourage him in your house, you don't have me in it."

Now another gentleman had entered and heard this : some servants also heard it. Colonel Hope, who firmly believed in his nephew's guilt, turned off, peppery and indignant ; and Gerard, giving vent to sundry unnephew-like expletives, strode after him. The colonel made a dash into a street cab, and Gerard walked towards the city.

Lady Frances Chenevix, her dress all right again, at least to appearance, was waiting to regain breath, after a whirling waltz. Next to her sat a lady who had also been whirling : Frances did not know her.

"You are quite exhausted : we kept it up too long," said the gentleman in attendance on the stranger. "What can I get you?"

"My fan : there it is. Thank you. Nothing else."

"What an old creature to dance herself down !" thought Frances. "She's forty, if she's a day."

The lady opened her fan, and, while using it, the diamonds of her rich bracelet gleamed right in the eyes of Frances Chenevix. Frances looked at it, and started : she strained her eyes and looked at it again : she bent nearer to it, and became agitated with emotion. If her recollection did not play her false, *that was the lost bracelet*.

She discerned her sister, Lady Adela Netherleigh, and glided up to her. "Adela, who is that lady?" she asked, pointing to the stranger.

"I don't know who she is," replied Lady Adela, carelessly. "I did not catch the name. They came with the Cadogans."

"The idea of your having people in your house that you don't know !" indignantly spoke Frances, who was working herself into a fever. "Where's Sarah ? do you know that ?"

"In the card-room, glued to the whist-table."

Lady Sarah, however, had unglued herself, for Frances only turned from Lady Adela to encounter her. "I do believe your lost bracelet is in the room," she whispered in agitation. "I think I have seen it."

"Impossible !" responded Lady Sarah Hope.

"It looks exactly the same ; gold links interspersed with diamonds : and the clasp is the same ; three stars. A tall, ugly woman has it on, her black hair strained off her face,"

"So very trying a style for plain people !" remarked Lady Sarah, en passant. "Where is she ?"

"There : she is standing up now. Let us get close to her. Her dress is that beautiful maize colour with old lace."

Lady Sarah Hope drew near, and obtained a sight of the bracelet. The colour flew into her face.

"It is mine, Fanny," she whispered.

But the lady, at that moment, took a gentleman's arm, and moved away. Lady Sarah followed her, with the view of obtaining another look. Frances Chenevix went to Mr. Netherleigh and told him. He showed himself hard of belief.

"You cannot be sure at this distance of time, Fanny. And, besides, more bracelets than one may have been made of that pattern."

"I am so certain that I feel as if I could swear to the bracelet," eagerly replied Lady Frances.

"Hush, hush, Fanny!"

"I recollect it perfectly: the bracelet struck me the moment I saw it. How singular that I should have been talking to Gerard Hope about it this night!"

Mr. Netherleigh smiled. "Imagination is very deceptive, Frances. Your having spoken to Mr. Hope of the bracelet brought it into your thoughts."

"But it could not have brought it to my eyes," returned Frances. "Stuff and nonsense about imagination, Mr. Netherleigh! I am positive it is the bracelet. Here comes Sarah."

"I suppose Frances has been telling you," observed Lady Sarah to her brother-in-law. "I feel convinced it is my own bracelet."

"But—as I have just remarked to Frances—other bracelets may have been made precisely similar to yours," he urged.

"If it is mine, the initials 'S. H.' are scratched on the back of the middle star. I did it one day with a penknife."

"You never mentioned that fact before, Lady Sarah," hastily responded the merchant.

"No. I was determined to give no clue. I was always afraid of the affair being traced home to Gerard, and it would have reflected so much disgrace on my husband's name."

"Did you speak to the lady?—did you ask where she got the bracelet?" interrupted Frances.

How could I?" retorted Lady Sarah. "I do not know her."

"I will," cried Frances, in a resolute tone.

"My dear Frances!" remonstrated Mr. Netherleigh.

"I vow I will," persisted Frances. But they did not believe her.

Lady Frances kept her word. She found the strange lady in the refreshment-room. Locating herself by her side, she entered upon a few trifling remarks, which were civilly received. Suddenly she dashed at once to her subject.

"What a beautiful bracelet!"

"I think it is," was the stranger's reply, holding out her arm for its inspection, without any reservation.

"Where did you buy it?" pursued Frances.

"Garrards are my jewellers."

This very nearly did for Frances: for it was at Garrards' that the colonel originally purchased it: and it seemed to give a colouring to Mr. Netherleigh's view of more bracelets having been made of the same pattern. But she was too anxious and determined to stand upon ceremony—for Gerard's sake: and he was dearer to her than the world suspected.

"We—one of my family—lost a bracelet exactly like this some time back. When I saw it on your arm, I thought it was the same. I hoped it was."

The lady froze directly, and laid down her arm, making no reply.

"Are you—pardon me, there are painful interests involved—are you sure you purchased this at Garrards'?"

"I have said that Messrs. Garrard are my jewellers," replied the stranger, in a repelling voice; and the words sounded evasive to Frances. "More I cannot say: neither am I aware by what law of courtesy you thus question me, nor whom you may be."

The young lady drew herself up, proudly secure in her name and rank. "I am Lady Frances Chenevix."

But the stranger only bowed in silence, and turned to the refreshment table. Frances went to find the Cadogans, and question them.

She was a Lady Livingstone, they told her, wife of a Sir Jasper Livingstone. The husband had made a mint of money at something or other, and been knighted; and now they were launching out into high society.

The nose of Lady Frances went into the air. City knight and his wife! that was it, was it. How could Mrs. Cadogan have taken up with them?

The Honourable Mrs. Cadogan did not choose to say: beyond the assertion that they were extremely worthy, good kind of people. She could have said that her spendthrift of a husband had borrowed money from Sir Jasper Livingstone; and to prevent being bothered for it, and keep them in good humour, they introduced the Livingstones where they could.

It seemed that nothing more could be done. Frances Chenevix went home; that is, to Colonel Hope's; and told her strange tale to Alice Seaton, not only about Gerard's being in England, but about the bracelet. Lady Sarah had nearly determined not to move in the matter, for Mr. Netherleigh had infected her with his disbelief, especially since she heard of Lady Livingstone's assertion that Messrs. Garrard were her jewellers. Not so Frances Chenevix. She was determined to follow it up: and next morning, saying evasively that she wanted to call at her father's, she got possession of Lady Sarah's carriage, and down she went to the Haymarket, to Garrards'. Alice Seaton, more fragile than ever, her once lovely countenance so faded now that she looked,

as Frances had said, dying, waited her return in a pitiable state of excitement. Frances came in, looking little less excited.

"Alice, it *is* the bracelet. I am more certain of it than ever. Garrards' people say they have sold articles of jewellery to Lady Livingstone, but not a diamond bracelet. Moreover they say that they never had, of that precise pattern, but the one bracelet Colonel Hope bought."

"What is to be done?" exclaimed Alice.

"I know: I shall go to those Livingstones. Gerard shall not stay under this cloud, if I can help him out of it. Mr. Netherleigh won't act in it; he laughs at me: Lady Sarah won't act; and we dare not tell the Colonel. He is so obstinate and wrong-headed, he would be for arresting Gerard, pending the investigation."

"Frances——"

"Now don't you preach, Alice. When I will a thing, I *will*: I am like my lady mother for that. Sarah says she scratched her initials inside the bracelet, and I shall demand to see it: if these Livingstones refuse, I'll put the detectives on the scent. I will; as sure as my name is Frances Chenevix."

"And if the investigation should bring the guilt home to—to—Gerard?" whispered Alice, in a hollow tone.

"And if it should bring it home to you! and if it should bring it home to me!" spoke the exasperated Frances. "For shame, Alice; it cannot bring it home to Gerard, for he was never guilty."

Alice Seaton sighed: she saw there was no help for it, for Lady Frances was resolute. "I have a deeper stake in this than you," she said, after a pause of consideration; "let me go to the Livingstones. Yes, Frances, you must not refuse me; I have a very, very urgent motive for wishing it."

"You, you weak mite of a thing! you would faint before you were half through the interview," cried Lady Frances, in a tone between jest and vexation.

Alice persisted. She had indeed a powerful reason for urging it, and Lady Frances conceded the point, though with much grumbling. The carriage was still at the door, for Frances had desired that it should wait, and Alice hastily dressed herself and went down to it, without speaking to Lady Sarah. The footman was closing the door upon her, when out flew Frances.

"Alice, I have made up my mind to go with you; I cannot keep my patience until you are back again. I can sit in the carriage while you go in, you know. Lady Livingstone will be two feet higher from to-day—that the world should have been gladdened with a spectacle of Lady Frances Chenevix waiting humbly at her door."

They drove off. Frances talked incessantly on the road, but Alice was silent: she was deliberating what she should say, and was nerving



herself to the task. Lady Livingstone was at home, and Alice, sending in her card, was conducted to her presence, leaving Lady Frances in the carriage.

Frances had described her as a woman as thin as a whipping-post, with a red nose : and Alice found Lady Livingstone answer to it very well. Sir Jasper, who was also present, was much older than his wife, and short and stout ; a good-natured looking man, with a bald head.

Alice, refined and sensitive, scarcely knew how she opened her subject, but she was met in a different manner from what she had expected. The knight and his wife were really worthy people, as Mrs. Cadogan had said : but the latter had a mania for getting into "high life and high-lived company:" a feat she would never thoroughly accomplish. They listened to Alice's tale with courtesy, and at length with interest.

"You will readily conceive the nightmare this has been to me," panted Alice, for her emotion was great. "The bracelet was under my charge, and it disappeared in this extraordinary way. All the trouble that it has been productive of to me I am not at liberty to tell you, but it has certainly helped to shorten my life."

"You look very ill," observed Lady Livingstone, with sympathy.

"I am worse than I look. I am going into the grave rapidly. Others less sensitive, or with stronger bodily health, might have battled successfully with the distress and annoyance ; I could not. I shall die in greater peace if this unhappy affair can be cleared. Should it prove to be the same bracelet, we may be able to trace out how it was lost."

Lady Livingstone left the room and returned with the diamond bracelet. She held it out to Miss Seaton, and the colour rushed into Alice's poor wan face at the gleam of the diamonds: she believed she recognized them.

"But stay," she said, drawing back her hand as she was about to touch it : "do not give it me just yet. If it be the one we lost, the letters S. H. are scratched irregularly on the back of the middle star. Perhaps you will first look if they are there, Lady Livingstone."

Lady Livingstone turned the bracelet, glanced at the spot indicated, and then silently handed it to Sir Jasper. The latter smiled.

"Sure enough here's something on the gold—I can't see distinctly without my glasses. What is it, Lady Livingstone?"

"The letters S. H., as Miss Seaton described : I cannot deny it."

"Deny it! no, my lady, what for should we deny it? If we are in possession of another's bracelet, lost by fraud, and if the discovery will set this young lady's mind at ease, I don't think either you or I shall be the one to deny it. Examine it for yourself, ma'am," added he, giving it to Alice.

She turned it about, she put it on her arm, her eyes lighting with the eagerness of conviction. "It is certainly the same bracelet," she affirmed: "I could be sure of it, I think, without proof, but Lady

Sarah's initials are there, scratched irregularly, just as she describes to have scratched them."

"It is not beyond the range of possibility that initials may have been scratched on this bracelet, without its being the same," observed Lady Livingstone.

"I think it must be the same," mused Sir Jasper. "It looks suspicious."

"Lady Frances Chenevix understood you to say you bought this of Messrs. Garrard," resumed Miss Seaton.

Lady Livingstone felt rather foolish. "What I said was, that Messrs. Garrard were my jewellers. The fact is, I do not know exactly where this was bought: but I did not consider myself called upon to proclaim that fact to a young lady who was a stranger to me, and in answer to questions which I thought were verging on impertinence."

"Her anxiety, scarcely less than my own, may have rendered her abrupt," replied Alice, by way of apology for Frances. "Our hope is not so much to regain the bracelet, as to penetrate the mystery of its disappearance. Can you not let me know where you did buy it?"

"I can," interposed Sir Jasper: "there's no disgrace in having bought it where I did. I got it at a pawnbroker's."

Alice's heart beat violently. A pawnbroker's! What dreaded discovery was at hand?

"I was one day at the east end of London, walking fast, when I saw a topas-and-amethyst cross in a pawnbroker's window," said Sir Jasper. "The thought struck me that it would be a pretty ornament for my wife and I went in to look at it. In talking about jewellery with the master he reached out this diamond bracelet, and told me *that* would be a present worth making. Now, I knew my lady's head had been running on a diamond bracelet; and I was tempted to ask what was the lowest figure he would put it at. He said it was the most valuable article of the sort he had had for a long while, the diamonds of the first water worth four hundred guineas of anybody's money, but that being second hand he could part with it for two hundred and fifty. And I bought it. There's where I got the bracelet, ma'am."

"That was just the money Colonel Hope gave for it new at Garrards'," said Alice. "Two hundred and fifty guineas."

Sir Jasper stared at her: and then broke forth with a comical attempt at rage, for he was one of the best-tempered men in the world.

"The old wretch of a cheat! Sold it to me at second-hand price, as he called it, for the identical sum it cost new! Why, he ought to be prosecuted for usury."

"It is just what I tell you, Sir Jasper," grumbled his lady. "You will go to these low, second-hand dealers, who always cheat where they can, instead of to a regular jeweller; and nine times out of ten you get taken in."

"But your having bought it of this pawnbroker does not bring me any nearer the knowing how he procured it," observed Miss Seaton.

"I shall go to him this very day and ascertain," returned Sir Jasper. "Tradespeople may not sell stolen bracelets with impunity."

Easier said than done. The dealer protested his ignorance and innocence, and declared he had bought it in the regular course of business at one of the pawnbrokers' periodical sales. And the man spoke truth, and the detectives were again applied to.

## II.

In an obscure room of a low and dilapidated lodging-house, in a low and dilapidated neighbourhood, there sat a man one evening in the coming twilight: a towering, gaunt skeleton, whose remarkably long arms and legs looked little less than skin and bone. The arms were fully exposed to view, since their owner, though he possessed and wore a waistcoat, dispensed with the use of a shirt. An article, once a coat, lay on the floor, to be donned at will—if it could be got into for the holes. The man sat on the floor in a corner, his head finding a resting-place against the wall, and he had dropped into a light sleep; but if ever famine was depicted in a face, it was in his. Unwashed, unshaven, with matted hair and feverish lips: the cheeks were hollow, the nostrils white and pinched, and the skin round the mouth had a blue tinge. Some one tried, and shook the door; it aroused him, and he started up, but only to cower in a bending attitude and listen.

"I hear you," cried a voice. "How are you to-night, Joe? Open the door."

The voice was not one he knew; consequently not one that might be responded to.

"Do you call this politeness, Joe Nicholls? If you don't open the door I shall take the liberty of opening it for myself: which will put you to the trouble of mending the fastenings afterwards."

"Who are you?" cried Nicholls, reading determination in the voice. "I'm gone to bed, and I can't admit folks to-night."

"Gone to bed at eight o'clock?"

"Yes: I am ill."

"I give you one minute, and then I come in. You will open it if you wish to save trouble."

Nicholls yielded to his fate: and opened the door.

The gentleman—he looked like one—cast his keen eyes round the room. There was not a vestige of furniture in it; nothing but the bare, dirty walls, from which the mortar crumbled, and the bare, dirty boards.

"What did you mean by saying you were gone to bed, eh?"

"So I was. I was asleep there," pointing to the corner, "and that's

my bed. What do you want?" added Nicholls, peering at the stranger's face in the gloom of the evening, but seeing it imperfectly, for his hat was drawn low over it.

"A little talk with you. That last sweepstake you put into ——"

The man lifted his face, and burst forth with such eagerness that the stranger could only arrest his own words, and listen.

"It was a swindle from beginning to end. I had scraped together the ten shillings to put in it; and I drew the right horse, and was shuffled out of the gains, and I have never had my dues; not a farthing of 'em. Since then I've been ill, and I can't get about to better myself. Are you come, sir, to make it right?"

"Some"—the stranger coughed—"friends of mine were in it also," said he: "and they lost their money."

"Everybody lost it; the getters-up bolted with all they had drawn into their fingers. Have they been took, do you know?"

"All in good time; they have left their trail. So you have been ill, have you?"

"Ill! just take a sight at me! There's a arm for a big man."

He stretched out his naked arm for inspection: it appeared as if a touch would snap it. The stranger laid his hand upon its fingers, and his other hand appeared to be stealing furtively towards his own pocket.

"I should say this looks like starvation, Joe."

"Some'at nigh akin to it."

A pause of unsuspicion, and the handcuffs were clapped on the astonished man. He started up with an oath.

"No need to make a noise, Nicholls," said the detective with a careless air. "I have two men waiting outside."

"I swear I wasn't in the plate robbery," passionately uttered the man. "I knew of it but I didn't join 'em, and I never had the worth of as much as a saltspoon, after it was melted down. And they call me a coward, and they leave me here to starve and die! I swear I wasn't in it."

"We'll talk of the plate robbery another time," said the officer, as he raised his hat; "you have got those bracelets on, my man, for another sort of bracelet. A diamond one. Don't you remember me?"

The prisoner's mouth fell. "I thought that was over and done with, all this time—I don't know what you mean," he added, correcting himself.

"No," said the officer, "it is just beginning. The bracelet is found, and has been traced to you. You were a clever fellow, and I had my doubts of you at the time: I thought you were too clever to go on long."

"I should be ashamed to play the sneak, and catch a fellow in this way. Why couldn't you come openly, in your proper clothes? not come playing the spy in the garb of a friendly civilian!"

"My men are in their 'proper clothes,'" was the equable answer, "and you will have the honour of their escort presently. I came because they did not know you, and I did."

"Three officers to take a single man, and he a skeleton!" retorted Nicholls, with a vast show of indignation.

"Ay; but you were powerful once, and ferocious too. The skeleton aspect is a recent one."

"And to be took for nothing! I don't know about any bracelet."

"Don't trouble yourself with inventions, Nicholls. Your friend is safe in our hands, and has made a full confession."

"What friend?" asked Nicholls, too eagerly.

"The lady you got to dispose of it for you to the Jew."

Nicholls was startled to incaution. "She hasn't split, has she?"

"Every particular she knew or guessed at. Split to save herself."

"Then there's no faith in woman."

"There never was yet," returned the officer. "If they are not at the top and bottom of every mischief, Joe, they are sure to be in the middle. 'Is this your coat?' touching it gingerly.

"She's a disgrace to the female sex, she is," raved Nicholls, disregarding the question as to his coat. "But it's a relief, now I'm took; it's a weight off my mind. I was always expecting of it: and I shall get food in the Old Bailey, at any rate."

"Ah," said the officer, "you were in good service as a respectable servant; you had better have stuck to your duties."

"The temptation was so great," observed the man, who had evidently abandoned all idea of denial; and now that he had done so, was ready to be voluble with remembrances and particulars.

"Don't say anything to me," said the officer. "It will be used against you."

"It came all along of my long legs," cried Nicholls, ignoring the friendly injunction, and proceeding to enlarge on the feat he had performed. And it may as well be observed that legs so long as his are rarely seen. "I have never had a happy hour since. I was second footman there, and a good place I had; and I have wished, thousands of times, that the bracelet had been in a sea of fire. Our folks had took a house in the neighbourhood of Ascot for the race week; they had left me at home to take care of the kitchen-maid and another inferior or two, taking the rest of the servants with them. I had to clean the winders before they returned, and I had druv it off till the Thursday evening, when out I got on the balqueny, to begin with the back drawing-room——"

"What do you say you got out on?"

"The balqueny. The thing with the green rails round it, that encloses the winder. While I was leaning over the rails before I began, I heard something like click—click—click going on in the fellow room

next door—which was Colonel Hope's—just as if light articles of some sort were being laid sharp on a table. Presently two voices began to talk, a lady's and a gentleman's, and I listened——”

“No good ever comes of listening, Joe,” interrupted the officer.

“I didn't listen for the sake of listening; but it was awful hot, standing outside there in the sun, and listening was better than working. I didn't want to hear, neither, for I was thinking of my own concerns, and what a fool I was to have idled away my time all day till the sun come on to the back winders. Bit by bit, I heard what they were talking of—that it was jewels they had got there, and that one of 'em was worth two hundred guineas. Thinks I, if that was mine, I'd do no more work. After a while, I heard them go out of the room, and I thought I'd have a look at the rich things, so I stepped over slanting-ways on to the little ledge running along the houses, holding on by our balqueny, and then I passed my hands along the wall till I got hold of their balqueny—but one with ordinary legs and arms couldn't have done it. You couldn't, sir.”

“Perhaps not,” remarked the officer.

“There wasn't fur to fall, if I had fell, only on to the kitchen leads underneath: leastways not fur enough to kill one, and the leads was flat. But I didn't fall, and I raised myself on to their balqueny, and looked in. My! what a show it was! stunning jewels, all laid out there: so close that if I had put my hand inside, it must have struck all among 'em: and the fiend prompted me to take one. I didn't stop to look, I didn't stop to think: the one that twinkled the brightest and had the most stones in it was the nearest to me, and I clutched it, and slipped it into my footman's undress jacket, and stepped back again.”

“And got safe into your balcony?”

“Yes; but I didn't clean the winder that night. I was upset like, by what I had done; and I think, if I could have put it back again, I should; but there was no opportunity. I wrapped it up in my winder-leather, and then in a sheet of brown paper, and then I put it up the chimbley in one of the spare bedrooms. I was up the next morning afore five, and I cleaned my winders: I'd no trouble to awake myself, for I had never slept. The same day, towards evening, you called, sir, and asked me some questions—whether we had seen anyone on the leads at the back, and such like. I said that master was just come home from Ascot, and would you be pleased to speak to him.”

“Ah!” again remarked the officer, “you were a clever fellow that day. But if my suspicions had not been strongly directed to another quarter, I might have looked you up more sharply.”

“I kep' it by me for a month or two, and then I gave warning to leave. I thought I'd have my fling, and I became acquainted with her—that lady you've just spoke of—and somehow she wormed out of



me that I had got it, and I let her dispose of it for me, for she said she knew how to do it without danger."

"What did you get for it?"

The skeleton shook his head. "Thirty-four pounds, and I had counted on a hundred and fifty. She took her oath she had not helped herself to a sixpence."

"Oaths are plentiful with some ladies," remarked the detective.

"She stood to it she hadn't kept a farthing, and she stopped and helped me to spend the change. After that was done she went over to stop with somebody else who was in luck. And I have tried to go on, and I can't: honestly or dishonestly, it seems all one: nothing prospers and I'm naked and famishing. I wish I was dying."

"Evil courses never do prosper, Nicholls," said the officer, as he called in the policemen, and consigned the gentleman to their care.

So Gerard Hope was innocent!

"But how was it you skilful detectives could not be on this man's scent?" asked Colonel Hope of Mr. Pullet, when he heard the tale.

"Colonel, I was thrown off it. Your positive belief in your nephew's guilt infected me; appearances were certainly very strong against him. Miss Seaton also helped to throw me off: she said, if you remember, that she did not leave the room; but it now appears that she did leave it when your nephew did, though only for a few moments. Those few moments sufficed to do the job."

"It is strange she could not tell the exact truth," growled the colonel.

"She probably thought she was exact enough, since she only remained outside the door, and could answer for it that no one entered by it. She forgot the window. I thought of the window the instant the loss was mentioned to me; but Miss Seaton's assertion, that she never had the window out of her view, prevented my dwelling on it. I did go to the next door, and saw this very fellow who committed the robbery, but his manner was sufficiently satisfactory. He talked too freely: I did not like that; but I found he had been in the same service fifteen months: and, as I must repeat, in my mind the guilt lay with another."

"It is a confoundedly unpleasant affair for me," cried the colonel. "I have published my nephew's disgrace all over London."

"It is more unpleasant for him, colonel," was the rejoinder of the officer.

"And I have kept him short of money, and suffered him to be sued for debt; and I have let him go and live among the runaway scamps over the water, and have not hindered his engaging himself as a merchant's clerk! In short, I have played the very deuce with him."

"But reparation lies, doubtless, in your own heart and hands, colonel."

"I don't know that, sir," testily concluded the colonel.

## III.

ONCE more Gerard Hope entered his uncle's house : not as an interloper, stealing into it in secret ; but as an honoured guest, to whom reparation was due, and must be made. Alice Seaton leaned back in her invalid chair, a joyous flush on her wasted cheek, a joyous happiness in her eye. Still the shadow of coming death was there, and Mr. Hope was shocked to see her—more shocked and startled than he had expected, or chose to express.

"Oh, Alice ! what has done this ?"

"That," she answered, pointing to the bracelet, which, returned to its true owner, lay on the table. "I should not have lived many years ; of that I am convinced ; but I might have been able to live a little longer than I now shall. It has been the cause of misery to many. Lady Sarah says she shall never regard it but as an ill-starred trinket, or wear it with any pleasure."

"But, Alice, why should you have suffered it thus to affect you ?" he remonstrated. "You knew your own innocence, and you say you believed and trusted in mine : what did you fear ?"

"I will tell you, Gerard," she whispered, a deeper hectic rising to her cheeks. "I could not have confessed my fear, even in dying ; it was too distressing, too terrible ; but now that it is all clear, I will tell it. *I believed my sister had taken the bracelet.*"

He uttered an exclamation of amazement.

"I have believed it all along. She had called to see me that night, and was, for a minute or two, in the room alone with the bracelets : I knew she, at that time, was short of money, and I feared she had been tempted to take it—just as this unfortunate servant man was tempted. Oh, Gerard ! the dread of it has been upon me night and day, preying upon my fears, weighing down my spirits, wearing away my health and my life. And I had to bear it all in silence. It is that enforced, dreadful silence that has killed me."

"Alice, this must have been a morbid fear."

"Not so—if you knew all. But it is at an end, and I am very thankful. I have only one hope now," she added, looking up at him with a sunny smile. Ah, Gerard ! can you not guess it ?"

"No," he answered, in a stifled voice. "I can only guess that you are lost to me."

"Lost to all here. Have you forgotten our brief conversation, the night you went into exile ? I told you then there was one far more worthy of you than I could have ever been."

"None will ever be half so worthy : or—I will say it, Alice, in spite of your warning hand—half so loved."

"Gerard," sinking her voice, "she has waited for you."

"Nonsense," he rejoined.

"She has. When she shall be your wife, you may tell her that I saw it and said it."

"My darling ——"

"Stay, Gerard," she gravely interrupted; "those words of endearment are not for me. Can you deny that you love her?"

"Perhaps I do—in a degree. Next to yourself ——"

"Put me out of your thoughts while we speak. If I were——where I so soon shall be, would she not be dearer to you than anyone on earth? Would you not be well pleased to make her your wife?"

"Yes, I might be."

"That is enough, Gerard. Frances, come hither."

"I thought you were talking secrets," said Lady Frances.

"As we were," answered Alice. "Frances, what can we do to keep him amongst us? Do you know what Colonel Hope has told him?"

"No. What?"

"That though he shall be reinstated in favour as to money matters, he shall not be in his affection or his home, unless he prove sorry for that first rebellion of his. I think Gerard is sorry for it: you must help him to be more so."

"Fanny," said Gerard, while a damask flush mantled in her cheeks, deeper than Alice's hectic, "*will* you help me?"

"As if I could make out head or tail of what you two are discussing!" cried she, as she attempted to turn away; but Gerard caught her to his side.

"Fanny—will you drive me again from the house?"

She lifted her eyes, twinkling with a little spice of mischief. "I did not drive you before."

"In a manner, yes. Do you know what did drive me?"

She had known it at the time: and Gerard read it in her face.

"I see it all," he murmured; "you have been far kinder to me than I deserved. Fanny, let me try and repay you for it."

Alice caught their hands together and held them between her own, with a mental aspiration for their life's future happiness. Some time back she could not have breathed it in so fervent a spirit: but—as she had said—the present world and its hopes were closing to her.

"But you know, Gerard," cried Lady Frances, in a saucy tone, "if you ever do help yourself to somebody's else's bracelet in reality, you must not expect me to go to prison with you."

"Yes I shall," he answered promptly. "A wife must share the fortunes of her husband."



## ONLY.

And this is the end of it all ! it rounds the year's completeness :  
 Only a walk to the stile, through fields afoam with sweetness ;  
 Only the sunset light, purple and red on the river ;  
 And a lingering low good-night, that means good-by for ever.

So be it ! and God be with you ! It had been perhaps more kind  
 Had you sooner (pardon the word) been sure of knowing your mind.  
 We can bear so much in youth—who cares for a swift sharp pain ?  
 And the two-edged sword of truth cuts deep, but it leaves no stain !

I shall just go back to my work—to my little household cares,  
 That never make any show. By times perhaps in my prayers,  
 I may think of you ! For the rest, on this way we've trodden together,  
 My foot shall fall as lightly as if my heart were a feather !

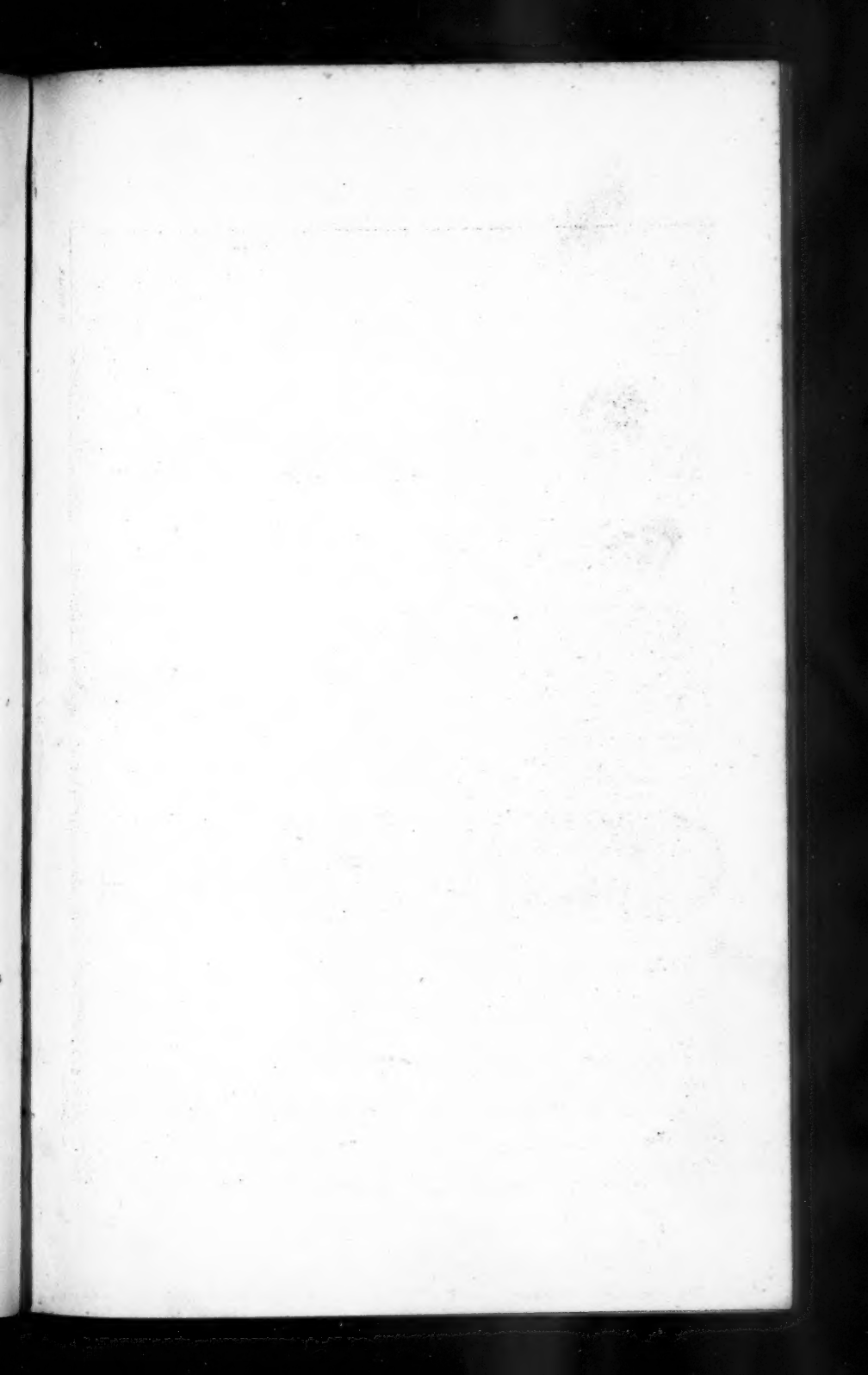
And not a woman's heart ! strong to have and to keep,  
 Patient when children cry, soft to lull them to sleep,  
 Hiding its secrets close, glad when another's hand  
 Finds for itself a gem where hers found only sand.

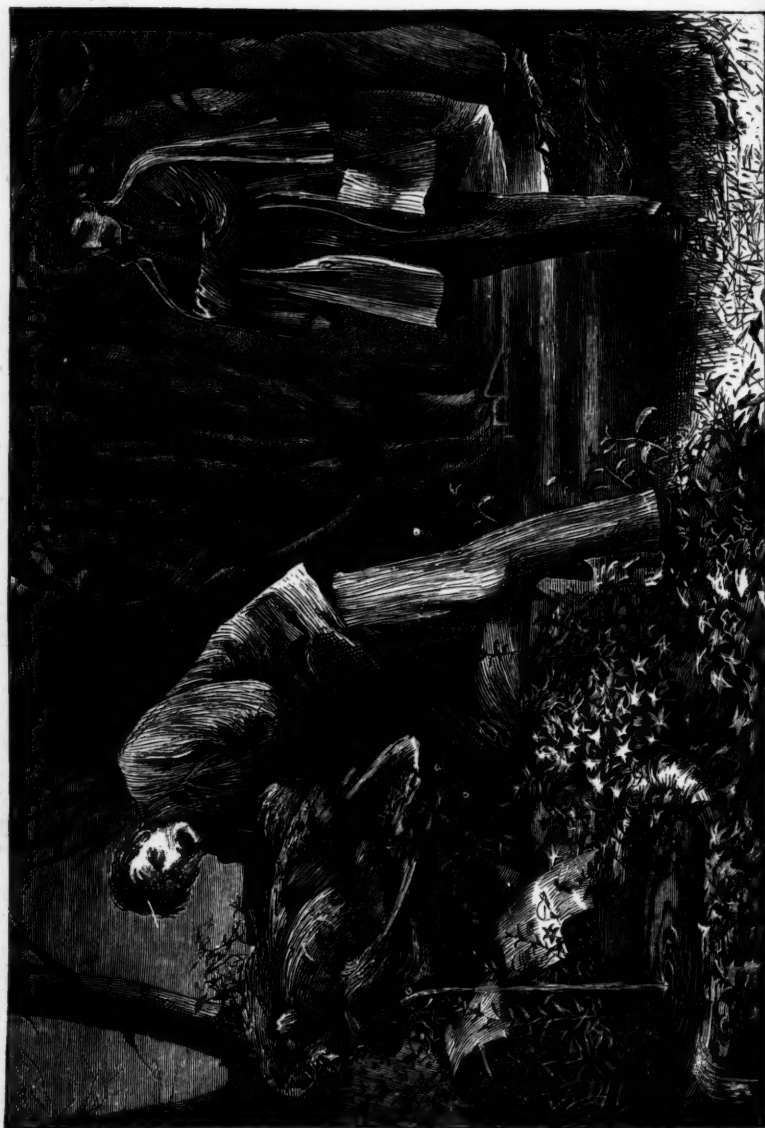
Good-by ! The year has been bright ! As oft as the blossoms come,  
 The peach with its waxen pink, the waving snow of the plum,  
 I shall think how I used to watch, so happy to see you pass  
 I could almost kiss the print of your foot on the dewy grass.

I am not ashamed of my love ! Yet I would not have yours now,  
 Though you laid it down at my feet. I could not stoop so low.  
 A love is but half a love that contents itself with less  
 Than love's utmost faith and truth and unwavering tenderness.

Only this walk to the stile ; this parting word by the river,  
 That flows so quiet and cold, ebbing and flowing for ever.  
 "Good-by !" Let me wait to hear the last, last sound of his feet !  
 Ah me ! but I think in this life of ours the bitter outweighs the sweet.







A. HOPKINS.

IN THE AVENUE.

J. SWAIN.